

EQUIPPING MINISTRY LEADERS FOR THE
EVOLVING NEEDS OF THE
CHURCH

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ABSTRACT

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The Bethel Independent Free Methodist Church is the context located in a rural Florida city. This project aims to investigate the insufficient preparation of leaders at Bethel Church in tackling the congregation's predicament. The challenges pose a threat to the sustainability of the church, necessitating a strategic leadership intervention. Through a seven-week training program, leaders will gain insights and skills. The anticipated outcome is the reversal of the decline in various ministry areas. The data collection methods were pre- and post-surveys, interviews, and journaling. Leaders engaged in four consecutive training modules covering pertinent leadership topics to support the church's recovery.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I thank God for His unwavering presence, guidance, and provision throughout this journey. It is through God's grace that I have been able to embark upon and complete this transformative work. I pray that God will be pleased with this work and that it will continue to be used for His glory.

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to my mentors, Reverend Dr. William Curtis and Reverend Dr. Lance Watson, for their invaluable guidance, wisdom, and encouragement. Their mentorship has been a beacon of inspiration, shaping my approach to leadership and ministry in profound ways. To my Watson-Curtis cohort brothers and sisters, I owe a special thanks for their camaraderie, support, and shared commitment to our collective growth. The bonds we have formed during this journey have been a source of strength and encouragement, and I am truly blessed to be part of such an extraordinary group of leaders.

I also want to acknowledge the church family that has been the foundation of this project: Bethel Independent Free Methodist Church. To its leaders and members, thank you for your openness, participation, and support. Your faith and dedication to this ministry have inspired me, and I am grateful for the opportunity to serve alongside you.

To my beloved wife, LaVon, your unwavering love and support have been my anchor. Thank you for standing by me through every challenge and triumph and for your

patience, encouragement, and faith in me. Your sacrifices and steadfast belief in this vision mean more to me than words can express.

To my parents and my mother-in-love, thank you for your prayers, support, and wisdom. Your presence in my life has been a constant reminder of God's faithfulness, and I am grateful for your guidance and encouragement throughout this journey.

To my professional associates, Reverend Dr. M. L. Kaufman, Reverend Dr. Chris Newcomb, and Dr. Roneisha Randall, I deeply appreciate your insights, feedback, and unwavering support. Your contributions have been instrumental in shaping the direction of this project and have enriched my understanding in countless ways.

To everyone who has walked alongside me during this journey, offering prayers, encouragement, and support, I thank you from the depths of my heart. This project stands as a testament to the power of faith, community, and shared purpose. I am humbled by the love and support I have received from so many.

DEDICATION

It is with honor that I dedicate this work to my beloved grandmother, Sylvia L. Davis. Her faith and guidance steered me back to Christ during one of the most difficult times of my life. After the untimely passing of my brother, Deon, you were my spiritual anchor, demonstrating the power of God's love and grace. In your honor and memory of my beloved brother Deon, I dedicate this project as a testament to the faith and resilience you both inspired in me.

Additionally, I dedicate this work to my father in love and father in ministry, the late Reverend Dr. Randolph Bracy, Jr. Your wisdom, encouragement, and unwavering belief in my potential sparked my intellectual curiosity and shaped my scholarly approach to ministry. Thank you for showing me the transformative power of faith combined with a commitment to learning and excellence. May your legacies continue to live on through this work, and I am eternally grateful for the profound and lasting impact you have had on my life and ministry.

INTRODUCTION

The central theme of this project is “Equipping Ministry Leaders for the Evolving Needs of the Congregation.” This initiative addresses the leadership challenges at Bethel Independent Free Methodist Church, a predominantly African American congregation located in rural Mount Dora, Florida. Once a thriving hub of spiritual and community life, Bethel has faced a prolonged decline in attendance, engagement, and ministry effectiveness. These challenges threaten the future of the church, demanding an intentional focus on leadership development to guide its renewal. This project employs a seven-week training program designed to equip Bethel’s leaders with the skills and spiritual foundation necessary to navigate the evolving needs of the congregation. The program is informed by four foundational perspectives: biblical, historical, theological, and interdisciplinary, each of which contributes critical insights and strategies for leadership and church renewal.

Chapter One, Ministry Focus, establishes the foundation for this project by exploring the spiritual and professional journey that has shaped my approach to leadership and ministry. It provides a reflective account of my spiritual autobiography, tracing the development of my faith, life experiences, and ministerial work up to this point. This chapter also examines the educational and professional milestones that have informed my understanding of leadership and equipped me to address the challenges of contemporary ministry.

In addition, this chapter bridges the gap between my personal development and the current context of this project: Bethel Independent Free Methodist Church. By highlighting my experiences and the intersections of my spiritual and professional growth, this chapter connects my development to the pressing leadership needs within Bethel's congregation. Finally, it introduces the project's focus on equipping ministry leaders to meet the evolving needs of the church, demonstrating how my journey aligns with the specific challenges and opportunities within Bethel's local context.

Chapter two, Biblical Foundation, is rooted in Ezra 5:11, where the Israelites assert their identity as servants of God and their commitment to rebuilding the temple amidst opposition. This scriptural narrative serves as a powerful metaphor for Bethel's current situation. Just as the Israelites faced challenges in their mission, Bethel Church is navigating a season of rebuilding and renewal. Ezra's leadership, marked by a focus on spiritual reformation and adherence to God's law, provides a model for guiding the church through periods of uncertainty and change. Drawing on this biblical text, the project emphasizes the importance of visionary leadership that remains grounded in faith. Ezra's example demonstrates how leaders can inspire a community to overcome obstacles by fostering spiritual growth and prioritizing covenantal fidelity. For Bethel's leaders, this foundation serves as a reminder that effective ministry begins with a reliance on God's faithfulness and a commitment to His mission.

Chapter three, the Historical Foundation of this project, examines the transformative impact of past movements, particularly the Protestant Reformation, to provide lessons for Bethel Church's renewal. The Reformation's emphasis on the priesthood of all believers and the transformative power of scripture underscores the

value of empowering individuals within the congregation. Leaders at Bethel are encouraged to adopt this model, fostering a sense of ownership and participation among church members. Martin Luther's commitment to transparency and the accessibility of scripture provides additional insights for contemporary leadership. These historical precedents remind Bethel's leaders of the importance of clear communication and collaborative ministry. By drawing on these lessons, the project equips leaders to engage their congregation more effectively, ensuring that everyone plays a role in the church's revitalization.

Chapter four, the theological foundation of the project, is shaped by the teachings of John Wesley, whose commitment to personal holiness and practical Christianity offers a framework for leadership development. Wesley's theology emphasized acts of mercy, works of charity, and social justice, which are principles that resonate deeply with Bethel's mission to serve its community. His focus on personal and social holiness underscores the importance of leaders undergoing their spiritual transformation to inspire and guide others effectively. Wesley's innovative approaches to leadership, including small group discipleship and the emphasis on spiritual disciplines, provide practical strategies for Bethel's training program. These practices foster accountability, collaboration, and spiritual growth, aligning with the broader goal of equipping leaders to address the congregation's evolving needs. For Bethel Church, Wesley's theological insights serve as a spiritual anchor and a practical guide for renewal.

Chapter five, the interdisciplinary foundation, integrates principles from transformative leadership theory with the biblical, historical, and theological insights explored in the previous chapters. Transformative leadership focuses on inspiring positive

change within individuals and organizations, making it an ideal framework for addressing Bethel's challenges. This leadership style emphasizes empowerment, collaboration, and adaptability, aligning with the project's goal of fostering a unified and resilient leadership team. By encouraging leaders to embrace a collaborative approach, the project highlights the importance of shared purpose and teamwork in navigating change. Transformative leadership also emphasizes the value of personal growth, which resonates with John Wesley's theological emphasis on holiness and spiritual transformation.

Chapter six, Project Analysis, thoroughly examines the project's development to conclusion and offers detailed insights into its practical implementation. It outlines the methods and strategies employed, focusing on how the training program was executed and its impact on Bethel Church's leadership. The chapter also identifies areas where adjustments and additional resources could strengthen future iterations of the project.

The analysis highlights how the project successfully integrated biblical, historical, theological, and interdisciplinary principles to equip Bethel's leaders with the tools needed for effective church renewal. Together, these principles provided a foundation for fostering spiritually grounded and practically effective leadership. By blending scriptural insights, historical lessons, theological frameworks, and leadership theories, the project offered a comprehensive approach to addressing the church's challenges.

The project's outcomes revealed significant growth in confidence and capability among Bethel's leaders. Pre-training assessments showed participants lacked clarity and preparedness to address the church's evolving needs. However, post-training evaluations demonstrated marked improvements in adaptability, spiritual grounding, and overall leadership readiness. Leaders expressed a renewed sense of purpose and commitment to

their roles, with many highlighting the lessons on servant leadership and transformational leadership as particularly impactful.

One of the project's most notable outcomes was the strengthened sense of unity and collaboration among Bethel's leaders. Through group discussions and reflective journaling, participants processed their learning, shared insights, and built mutual support. This collaborative environment fostered not only individual growth but also a collective spirit of teamwork, which will be essential as the church moves forward in its renewal efforts.

Ultimately, the project demonstrated that equipping leaders with spiritual and practical tools can inspire meaningful change. By holistically addressing the leaders' growth, the training program paved the way for Bethel Church's renewal and long-term sustainability. This chapter also reflects on the intersections between the project's execution and outcomes, identifying areas where modifications could enhance its effectiveness and ensure its relevance for future applications.

In conclusion, this project represents a transformative journey for both Bethel Independent Free Methodist Church and its leaders, mirroring my path of faith, growth, and renewal. Through a seven-week training program informed by biblical, historical, theological, and interdisciplinary foundations, the project seeks to equip leaders with the tools necessary to address the evolving needs of their congregation. Grounded in scripture and enriched by lessons from history and theology, this initiative emphasizes the power of spiritual growth, collaboration, and effective leadership in fostering meaningful change. As Bethel embarks on this journey of renewal, this project stands as a testament

to the potential for transformation when faith and leadership intersect with intentional effort and divine guidance.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

Introduction

The call to Christian Ministry has been my greatest assignment. Certainly, everything I have experienced in life has contributed to my preparation and development for the ordained assignment and work of serving as a pastor of the local church. Therefore, coupled with life experiences, a faithful relationship with God, and a sound theological education, I believe I have the skills that qualify me to fulfill the high expectations of the call to pastor.

As a child, I was never comfortable or content with not having a healthy and loving relationship with my dad; and I often felt that no one else cared. Therefore, I believe nothing was ever done to correct the problem. Nevertheless, my mother tried to resolve the imbalance my family was experiencing; by later getting married to my new stepfather. He was not the biological father of any of us, but we were all excited my mom was now married, and we had a father figure in the house. Immediately, my brothers and I treated him like a father; we believed our lives were going to be different and better. Soon after the wedding, less than six months later we moved away from my grandmother's, and my mom and stepfather moved the family into a house across town, in an all-white neighborhood.

My brothers and I were excited about the new house, but my older brother remained with my grandmother. My stepfather had two sons from a previous marriage, but they rarely spent any time at our house. He spent more time with us than he did with his biological sons. The first few years were good, but I personally still wanted a relationship with my birth father. My stepfather was a good man. He worked extremely hard to provide for us. He loved my mom and treated her well. We had some good times and some bad but nothing to me was like having a healthy and fruitful relationship with my birth father.

Due to my wanting a relationship with my father, I eventually grew uncomfortable with being close to my stepfather. I loved my stepfather, but I never wanted him to replace my father, and I started to feel that was my mom's plan. My stepfather was the disciplinary parent in the house and my mom would always expect him to provide any punishment my brother and I possibly earned or deserved. Living with my mom and stepfather was not what I thought it would be like. I soon learned that the all-white neighborhood was not where I wanted to live. We were always blamed for any trouble in the neighborhood. We were always in fights with the white children in our neighborhood, and as children from the inner city we never felt welcomed. I started hating living there, and I was unhappy. I hated school. I hated church. I hated so many things about my life at that time. After moving away from our old neighborhood, I eventually became a terrible student. Every week my stepfather would visit my school and discover how I had been misbehaving. After his visits my behavior never changed. I often wonder if I had been a better student, how different my life would have been.

Additionally, I remember how my family went to church religiously. As a child, my parents were members of a small non-denominational church. It was mandatory for my brother and I to attend and participate. As I got older, I started to drift away from regular attendance. As I reflect on why this happened, I am convinced it was due to the obvious disconnect the church we were attending was experiencing with teenagers my age. At that time, I felt church was a chore and a waste of time. The preaching and teaching were stale, repetitive, irrelevant, and unappealing. The preached Word never included my generation or any issues that I thought were relevant. Nothing about this ministry was engaging to us or focused on our needs. Every presentation seemed to include a corrective punitive fire and brimstone approach which made me want to rebel even more and eventually, I did. I do not have many fond memories of church as a child. I went because I was told.

Unfortunately, I could never express my feelings about this to my parents or say anything negative about our church. As stated earlier, the church we attended was small in the Orlando area. Not many children our age joined this church or stayed, if they joined. No one from any generation ever came and stayed too long. My parents and the pastor of the church were good friends; as a result, my parents were a major part of the leadership of the church. Plainly stated, we were permanent fixtures in the church. We had no plans of leaving and, as a family, we were always present for everything that happened. We were present several times a week, Bible study, worship service, and any other meeting the pastor thought we needed to attend.

Like home, I started to hate church. To me, they both were similar. A place where my feelings were neglected, and my problems were ignored. I never understood the

church to be nothing more than a place where you were corrected for wrongdoing, called out for not doing, or judged for not doing enough. I do not recall hearing any good news about Jesus. If so, I think I would have believed that he had the power to heal my non-existing or broken relationship with my father and the other issues I was facing at the time. I do not recall any counseling, therapy, or talks about what I was going through as a child. Never did I experience a time where I was able to openly express how I felt about my father, mother, stepfather, or any other concerns that were impacting me but every time the doors were open, we were in church.

Eventually, much of this caused me not to want to live with my mom and stepfather; therefore, I convinced my mom to allow me to move with my grandmother and older brother back into the inner-city projects. I felt that my grandmother was much more compassionate than my mother. Additionally, I could transfer schools and attend the majority black school in the inner-city where I believe the teachers were more sensitive to black kids like me. Also, I would get into less trouble; and I could go to church with my grandmother. My grandmother was an old-school Baptist. My grandmother's church was different, and they always had youth my age in church. I would go often but by then I became involved in other activities that were more attractive than going to church. I loved school, and I started doing much better but by my junior year, I was dating and became extremely active with my new girlfriend. By the end of our junior year, she was pregnant and like my father, I too was about to start my journey as a father before I was ready.

This forced me to grow up fast and as a result, I made several mistakes. I moved out to live on my own and by the age of twenty-three, I was married. I thought getting

married was the right thing for me to do. Being in a committed relationship would give me the discipline I needed. After having two children, I was determined not to father anymore outside of marriage. We were married for eight years, and it was a constant struggle. After three years of marriage, she gave birth to my third child. I thought this would help our marriage and finally gave peace. Sadly, it just gave us something else to fight over. Our fights became worse, and we never could manage to get along for more than a few weeks. Back then, I blamed her for our issues and problems but now I see I was just as guilty.

I was not ready for marriage. I had unresolved issues that I allowed to penetrate my marriage that eventually damaged it. I decided I wanted to get a divorce, but I did not want to lose my daughter. I was already parenting two children living in separate homes. So, I stayed married, regardless of the unhappiness. Eventually, I made her life miserable, and she made my life miserable.

After eight years of marriage, I had a tragedy to happen in my family. My younger brother was murdered. He was the victim of an armed robbery in our city. This was the worst thing I had ever experienced. I was so devastated. He and I were extremely close growing up. He was my first friend. It was always he and I. Growing up we were always attached until I left home to live with my grandmother. So, there I was dealing with his passing all while believing I was living in pure hell. I did not have the answers to my problems, and I had no one to turn to.

As a result of the grief and anguish I was under, I decided to reconnect with the church. I joined Community Baptist Church (CBC), the church where my grandmother often took me when I was a child. This was the church I came to when I had problems at

home as a child. This church was the place that could aid in my recovery as an adult. Therefore, I dedicated my life back to Christ and became an active member of CBC. As a result, I became immersed in Christian ministry, and I attended church regularly. I volunteered with the youth ministry and dedicated much of my time and talent to help with its growth and stability.

Unfortunately, I was headed in one direction and my former wife was headed in another. My marriage was not getting better, and I decided I could no longer remain in that situation. This was a hard decision to make because of the impact it had on my daughter, but she was also starting to become affected by the toxicity of our relationship. Therefore, it was best for all of us if we just went our separate ways. Unsurprisingly, I now see how this was not the best decision and it only created more tension between us; ultimately my relationship with my daughter was bruised and damaged.

This was the only way to deal with the unresolved and unreconcilable differences between my former wife and myself. I was not taught how to deal with domestic issues and marital problems. Most of my actions and reactions were learned behaviors I absorbed through the years. My parents still have unresolved issues, and I did not know how to fix my marriage and save my family. Therefore, I quit and ran to God for help. I submerged myself in ministry. Anytime the doors of the church were open, I was there. I was hurting, lost, and like a failure. Going to church and serving God changed me, my life, and much more. I became involved with the youth ministry to make up for breaking up my family. I wanted to help offer them something different than I was given as a child. My goal was to help them avoid and escape the pitfalls of life that I had already experienced. I gave the youth at my church and my own three children a path that would

help them achieve more in life. Serving and supporting the youth of the church gave me purpose. As a result, I begin to grow as a Christian and a leader in the church.

Subsequently, I heard the call to ministry and to preach the gospel. I expressed my call to preach the gospel in 2010. After being licensed to preach the gospel, I saw myself desiring the tools necessary to become more effective in ministry. As a leader in the church, it became a priority to expose myself to other churches and ministries to evaluate what others were doing, so that I could be better. This practice helped me tremendously and showed me exactly how much more I could do and how much more there was to learn. I attended conferences and revivals. I watched televised services and listened to different podcasts. I discovered a pattern and consistent style of preaching, teaching, and leadership portrayed by certain preachers that was different than what I was accustomed to and exposed to growing up. In these moments I experienced divine revelation. I knew what I wanted to become and what needed to be done.

Again, my goal as a minister was to help others avoid the pitfalls that I had endured. I believed that due to my upbringing and exposure, I was limited. I had never been properly mentored by or exposed to someone with this kind of experience. Now, I must admit that some of this was my fault because of my inability to do well in school; nevertheless, I see how important it is to have sound teaching and outstanding leadership. In learning this was available to a preacher of the gospel, I became extremely excited and interested in knowing how I could receive such training.

The desire to learn and getting more exposure continued to be an important and priority to me. I vowed and committed to get all that God had in store for me so that I could become better. Before my life started to spiral, I began taking college classes

toward a bachelor's degree. At the time, I was only doing it to obtain a promotion on my job. After my divorce, I went back to finish. I was headed in an entirely different direction than I had ever envisioned. During this process, I met a young lady in church who was opposite of the women I had ever dated in the past. She was highly educated, had never been married, did not have children, and was the daughter of a well-known pastor in the city. To me, we had nothing in common. No way she would get involved with a divorcee, father of three, no-degree having a brother like me.

Although I did not think she would become interested in me, I became more and more interested in her. I eventually pursued her, and we became friends instantly. As a recent divorcee, I had nothing to offer someone. I was heartbroken, during the divorce, I lost my job; therefore, I also did not have any money at that time. I was trying to reinvent myself and lose the old me. All I had were new dreams and goals recently created for myself. Surprisingly, she saw what I saw in me and wanted to support my dreams and help me reach my goals. Most of everything I prayed for she had already seen accomplished. She believed in me from the first day we met and encouraged me daily to stay focused on my goals and dreams.

We dated for five years before getting married and during those five years, I made a complete comeback. I finished school and finished my bachelor's degree. Additionally, her father became my mentor, and he helped me achieve my ministerial goals. I never imagined that so much could be the result of having a healthy and fruitful relationship with someone. We continued to grow together; we all became a family. She was kind and generous to my children. She became close to my mother. We were both active in the

church and the community. We began achieving so much together and we pushed each other to do more.

We decided that if I was going to achieve my goal of being effective in ministry, like her father I needed to go to seminary. I had never heard anything about seminary, but I was confident this was the right decision. This eventually landed me in the Masters of Christian Ministry program at Bethune Cookman University. This is when I begin to learn and acquire an understanding that will forever impact my relationship with God, the church, and God's people.

As an African American preacher, I needed a better understanding of how to relate to those in my church and community. Also, I needed a better understanding of how the word applied to me. When I am reflecting on how Jesus and his ministry were explained to me as a child, I realize how important preaching from the black experience can impact the progress of black people and the black church. This perspective was not available to me and as a result, my interpretation of Jesus and his ministry was influenced by a theology that did not include social justice and liberation for all walks of life. Therefore, having the desire for exposure and pursuing a better understanding allowed me to begin to see things from a different lens. I continued to learn even more about Jesus and his ministry, and I discovered how much I did not know and how not seeing Jesus from this perspective is possibly causing others in the black church to remain damaged, bruised, disengaged, and unresponsive as I once was while suffering from pain and grief. I consider myself as a progressive member of the church, with a strong faith. For some reason, after Bethune Cookman University (BCU) I believe I have been baptized and re-born all over again.

The impact this new understanding has made on my ministry and my preaching is unbelievable. The changes I have applied to how I study and approach the holy text are certainly different. Nothing is more enlightening than the evolution and exposure I have received concerning the Christian faith and my walk with God.

For so long, I have been taught what not to do and never formally introduced to what I am supposed to do. My childhood was full of correction and criticism, but there was little encouraging and uplifting. We were bullied and tormented into a relationship with Christ. I later found to be the very opposite of what Christ intended to happen. It was through training and development that God changed my life around. I have been redeemed, revived, and restored because of replacing old beliefs with new beliefs, old behaviors with new behaviors, and an old man with a new man, that is in Christ Jesus. My favorite scripture is recorded in 2 Corinthians 5:17; "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here."¹

Context

On December 10, 2020, the members of the Bethel Independent Church, located in Mount Dora, Florida elected me, Reverend Adrian Ray Davis as their senior pastor. It should be noted, how the Bethel church has only called three pastors in the seventy-five years of existence. The Bethel Independent Free Methodist Church was founded and formed in 1945 in the city of Mount Dora, Florida. The founding and organizing members of Bethel were former members of the Mount Olive African Methodist Episcopal Church. Several members and the former pastor, of the Mount Olive Church,

¹ Biblical citations are from the New International Version, unless otherwise noted, 2 Corinthians 5:17.

Reverend McNair decided after continued and ongoing frustration of the inner workings of the African Methodist Episcopal Church to form and start a new church and denomination in the city of Mount Dora.

According to the church records, those who left their home church left because of their displeasure with the administrative principals of the AME church, their practices, and the excessive financial responsibilities imposed by the AME church. Following the decision of the new members of Bethel, other AME members in the area decided to leave their home churches and they too, formed independent Methodist churches. The Bethel church called Reverend Norman McNair as their first pastor. Additionally, Reverend McNair was called to pastor the newly formed St. John Independent Free Methodist. He pastored both churches until a pastor had been selected to take over St. John. He rotated between both churches, serving at each church only two Sundays per month.

Although the Bethel Church separated from the AME structure, it was unanimously agreed by the founding members to remain faithful to the Methodist faith, traditions, and doctrine to remove episcopal polity, giving all authority to the local congregation. The aim of the newly formed churches was to create freedom from organizational control and eliminate episcopal hierarchy. Hence, the name became Free Methodist. Most of the founding members of Bethel were residents of the city of Mount Dora. Among them, were several notable people from the community. There was Councilman Cauley Lott, a former educator, a member, and province polemarch of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc., and the first African American to be elected to Mount Dora's city council. Another notable member was Mr. Richard Strickland, the second African American Police officer to serve on the Mount Dora Police Department. The Bethel

Church had many members who were major influencers in the predominately black community of Mount Dora. They worked as educators, business owners, and in healthcare and they all lived in East Town, Mount Dora, and were members of Bethel.

The city of Mount Dora is a small town, located in Lake County, Florida. A county and state that historically has been known for its uncivil and discriminatory practices against African Americans. The Bethel church was established in a predominately black community in 1945 and all its members since its start have been African American. The city of Mount Dora was named after its popular lake, Lake Dora. Lake Dora was named by government surveyors who were sent to survey a largely vacant land in Florida. The surveyors discovered that the land was occupied by Mount Dora's first settlers. Therefore, the surveyors named the lake after the wife of one of the settlers who was extremely hospitable to the government officials; her name was Dora. Originally the city became popular to travelers because of its beautiful lake at the heart of the city.

One of the major highways for traveling in the state of Florida, that goes from north to south originally passed directly by the Grand Lake in Mount Dora. During the great depression and after the lake was polluted, the citizens of the town decided to reroute the highway and develop the land around Lake Dora. Lake Dora was popular for its fishing, and it was one of Mount Dora's strongest assets. The polluted lake caused great harm to Mount Dora's tourism and tourism was a major part of its economy. Therefore, its restoration after being polluted was essential to the ongoing progress of the city. The area surrounding Lake Dora was mostly agricultural and many of the field workers and agriculture workers lived around the lake. The Orlando Sentinel writes,

“While most Southern towns went through a turbulent Reconstruction period in the late 1800s, black and white families jointly developed Mount Dora's waterfront area and for four decades lived side by side in relative harmony.”² However, after the lake was threatened and during the Great Depression this changed, and the city began to divide due to economic hardship and a new vision for the city's development. Therefore, many residents who lived surrounding the lake were moved further into town and most of them were African American.

In the early 1900s, the railroad began to spread in the state of Florida, and Mount Dora was included in its plans. Like the new plans for the lakefront area, this also caused many of the earlier inhabitants of Mount Dora to relocate. Eventually, most African Americans who once lived near Lake Dora moved and settled in the historical area known as East Town of Mount Dora. East Town became known as the black section of Mount Dora and due to new Jim Crow laws and the rising cost of the lakefront property, the African Americans did not move back to a lakefront property.

East Town Mount Dora was still a thriving area but during the 1920s the city of Mount Dora began to experience a rise in crime activity and contentious race relations. Unfortunately, most of the crime was unfairly blamed on the town's African American community. As a result, the African American community eventually became restricted to remaining a separate community and East Town was their residence. The unproven allegations were enough to cause great concern for East Town and because of Jim Crow laws and other discriminating factors; segregation and separation became the norm and

² Lynn M. Homan and Thomas Reilly, *Mount Dora* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2000), 37-45.

blacks rarely visited the downtown area or lake front areas of Mount Dora. As a result, blacks begin to establish their businesses and economic opportunities in East Town. There was a school for blacks in East Town and many churches began to form.³

Mount Dora was in the Lake County area. As a result, East Town was impacted by the rigorous and aggressive nature of the Lake County Sheriff's Office. During these years of uncivil rest and community shifting, the Lake County sheriff was named Willis Virgil McCall. He was elected in 1944 the year before the start of the Bethel Independent Free Methodist Church. In 1949, he gained national attention because of his role in the arrest of four innocent boys who were wrongly accused by a white teenager, who told police she and her husband were driving home from a dance when they were attacked by four young Black men who abducted and raped her at gunpoint. This case is widely known as the case of the Groveland Four.⁴ These actions and others alike had an impact on the black communities throughout Lake County, including the city of Mount Dora. The people of East Town were often threatened and mistreated by the deputies and followers of Sheriff McCall. As a result of this racial tension and unlawful treatment many of the residents in East Town Mount Dora moved to surrounding cities, including the city of Orlando but those who stayed became terrified of the Lake County Sheriff. Therefore, they lived in terror; and they were marginalized and disenfranchised by their white neighbors.

Despite the racial tension in Mount Dora, many African Americans begin to thrive. East Town was full of African American homeowners, schoolteachers, black

³ Homan, Reilly, *Mount Dora*, 37-45.

⁴ Amanda Holpuch, "Four Black Men Wrongly Charged with Rape Are Exonerated 72 Years Later," *New York Times*, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/22/us/groveland-four-exonerated-florida.html>.

politicians, and entrepreneurs. Mount Dora is located close to Orlando, Florida, and less than an hour from the world's most popular beach, Daytona Beach. Due to its location in the rural area of Florida, it has always been a place for farming and harvesting. It has some of the best fruit and vegetable fields in the state. Many of those born and raised in Mount Dora continue to live there because of its convenient location between a big city and the countryside.

Today, the city of Mount Dora continues to see growth, but its residents continue to live on opposite sides of town. Mount Dora is identified as a diverse community, but the residents of its neighborhoods suggest otherwise. Tourism is still a major reason many come to visit Mount Dora's downtown area but for black residents due to its unpopular past rarely visit this admired area of Mount Dora. As a result, blacks and whites primarily live on separate sides of town and rarely engage together in any activity.

New data recently reports that currently, the population of the city of Mount Dora is approximately 17,000. It states that Mount Dora is growing at a rate of 2.37% annually and its population has increased by 4.86% since the most recent census that was completed in 2020, which recorded a population of 16,341. The city only spans approximately nine miles, but Mount Dora has a population density of 2,132 people per square mile. Further research shows that the average household income in Mount Dora is \$72,035 with a poverty rate of 14.60%. The data show that the median age in Mount Dora is fifty years old, males reporting at fifty-two years old, and females reporting at the age forty-nine years old. The current racial composition of Mount Dora is approximately 72% white, 20% Black or African American and Other races make up 3% of its population. In the city of Mount Dora, reports show that 16% of Mount Dorians have

earned a master's degree or higher, 15% of Mount Dorians have earned bachelor's, 28% report some college or associate degrees, 30% completed High school and less than 10% of the population has less than high school education.⁵

The data shows that most of the residents of Mount Dora are white and only 20% are black. Many blacks either moved away or died. Therefore, the possibility of growing and maintaining a predominately black church in this area has been challenging. Currently, the membership at the Bethel Church is approximately sixty-nine, with possibly thirty-five members actively participating. The median age of the church is fifty-one and presently children are not in attendance. Presently 40% of the members of Bethel are retired, out of work, or unable to work. Therefore, many members receive social security or other fixed-income payments from retirement, government, or other supplemental sources. The property of Bethel and all its contents are paid in full but have not been updated or renovated in decades. The church currently owns eight acres of land, two buildings, and a house used for rental property. Additionally, the church owns two vehicles, a twenty-four-passenger bus and a sixteen-passenger van but neither of the vehicles has been used for nearly ten years.

The Bethel church has seen little to no growth spiritually, financially, or physically in the last fifteen years. There have been members who have reported the church was once a thriving church in the community. There have been reports stating Bethel had a minimum of at least 150 members. These reports have not been verified. There is no documentation to support these statements or records to prove they are

⁵ Neilsberg Research, "Mount Dora, FL Population by Year," Neilsberg, <https://www.neilsberg.com/insights/mount-dora-fl-population-by-year/>.

accurate. Under the leadership of the former pastor, Reverend Lucious Taylor, it has been said that Bethel saw its best days but additionally, it saw its worst.

Due to the decline in membership and poor attendance, in 2017 Reverend Taylor announced his retirement. Pastor Taylor retired in 2018, and the Bethel Church was without a leader for two years. During those two years, like most churches and other organizations, Bethel was impacted by the pandemic. As a result, they were forced to close its doors for three months in 2020 and began to experience yet another obstacle that affected the progress of the church. Also, during the pandemic, attendance suffered due to the passing of some members, and some even decided to move their membership. The Bethel church was functioning with approximately ten members on any given Sunday.

Ministry Journey

On December 10, 2020, I was blessed to become the senior pastor of the Bethel Independent Church, Mount Dora, Florida. During my time as pastor, we have made incredible progress, even while being impacted by the effects of the coronavirus. Under my leadership, we have added three new ministries: Meet-the-Need Ministry, Cauley Lott Scholarship Ministry, and the Media Ministry. As a result of these highly affected ministries, the church fed over three thousand families during our food drives in 2021. In 2021 we gave away over five thousand in scholarships to deserving students in the community. We partnered with the city and hosted a Christmas toy giveaway and back-to-school event. Additionally, we are now live-streaming our services through social media.

Since my arrival to Bethel, I was intentional in showing how passionate I am about serving God's people, reaching the lost, and the betterment of the unfortunate. I

have been known to speak for those who cannot speak for themselves, pray for the sick, and give to those in need, my many years of ministry experience have taught me how to do so. It has taught me how to work as part of a team, effectively communicate the Word of God to individuals of all ages and generations, as well as share Christ's love beyond the walls of the church. My assignment includes developing and training God's people for Kingdom living and helping them on their quest for economic empowerment.

Coupled with my ministry experience, for nearly twenty years I have worked for some of the largest distribution companies in the country. I am employed as a District Sales Manager at the Keurig Dr. Pepper Company. My job experience has proven to add value to my role as pastor. As a district manager, I have the honor of managing a team of twenty-four people, including managers, supervisors, and frontline employees. Under my leadership, I am responsible for managing budgets and day-to-day sales execution in the Central Florida area. My job includes problem-solving, managing people, giving direction, providing support, and much more. There is an overlap between my position as a pastor and my secular position as a sales manager.

I recall, how I expressed my call to preach the gospel in 2010. It was after being licensed to preach the gospel I saw myself desiring the tools necessary to be effective in ministry. I wanted to be different than the leaders I had experienced as a child. I wanted to hear and learn the word of God. I wanted others to hear and learn the word of God. I wanted to teach in a way that listeners could articulate and repeat any message I was given to deliver. As a leader, it became a priority to expose myself to other churches and ministries to evaluate what they were doing, for professional development. This practice helped me tremendously and showed me exactly how much more I could do and how

much more there was to learn. I discovered was a pattern and consistent style of preaching, teaching, and leadership portrayed by certain preachers that was different than what I was accustomed to and what I had been exposed to growing up.

The leaders who captivated me most were all educated, and seminary trained. They were scholarly sharp and socially engaged leaders of the community. I aimed to help others avoid the pitfalls that I had endured, and I saw that due to my upbringing and limited exposure, I was unprepared to lead. I had never been properly mentored or properly prepared for ministry. John Maxwell, suggests that “Leaders are learners and their capacity to develop and improve their skills distinguishes leaders from their followers.” To be a good leader, you must learn and develop the necessary skills to lead.⁶ Therefore, I made my mission during my journey to absorb and obtain what is needed to fulfill the calling to the pastorate.

Concerns

The call to Bethel has been the testing ground for this theory. Upon my arrival at the Bethel Church, it was c dealing with low attendance, no community engagement, no leadership, and grief from the loss of their former pastor, who died shortly after retiring. The church was operating without a church governing system, no governing procedures were available, the members were not supporting the church financially, and the property of the church was in dire need of repairs. The financials are poorly recorded because the church has been using an antiquated system to take records of giving. Most of the officers have left or died and there has not been a call for fresh leadership and new officers.

⁶ John C. Maxwell, *Leadership 101- What Every Leader Needs to Know* (Boston, MA: Thomas Nelson Publisher, 2002), 61-65.

Therefore, no one knows their roles and responsibilities. Also, some are holding positions they are possibly not qualified or equipped to have. Additionally, the Bethel church does not possess an active and effective evangelism, missions, or outreach ministry.

Recent studies show in the past twenty years, more churches have seen an acceleration in poor attendance, with a twenty-percentage-point decline since 1999 and more than half of that change occurring since the current decade.⁷ Furthermore, the decline in church membership is consistent with larger societal trends in declining church attendance and an increasing proportion of Americans have no Christian affiliation. Previous studies prove that U.S. church membership was 70% or higher from 1937 through 1976, falling modestly to an average of 68% in the 1970s through the 1990s.⁸ This data correlates with the patterns seen at the Bethel church. During its humble beginnings growth was inevitable, but in the past twenty years, they have not been able to compete with the trends of society and now are experiencing declining church attendance.⁹

Solutions

Overall, the Bethel church has proven to be in dire need of a leader who possesses skills at managing the spiritual and someone who is strong with administration. A leader

⁷ M. J. Jeffrey, "US Church Membership Falls Below Majority for First Time," *Gallup News* 29 (2021): 8.

⁸ David Flower, Jon Musgrave, and Jill Musgrave, "A Traditional Protestant Church Experiencing Substantial Membership Decline: An Organizational Strength Analysis and Observations to Attend or Leave the Institution," *International Journal of Organization Theory and Behavior* 23, no. 3 (2020): 207-223.

⁹ Gregory Smith, Patricia Tevington, Justin Nortey, Michael Rotolo, and Asta Kallo, "Religion," Pew Research Center, <https://doi.org/https://www.pewresearch.org/religion>.

who possesses a passion for teaching, training, and developing God's people for Christian discipleship. The Bethel Church needs of comprehensive plan that will support growth and sustainability in this post-pandemic era. Therefore, after consideration of my current context and my ministry journey, I have concluded that the focus and direction of this doctoral project will include a solution that will help Bethel evolve, engage, and evangelize others in Christian ministry.

According to the Great Commission recorded in the Gospel of Matthew 28:18-20, Jesus charged his disciples with the responsibility of recruiting others for the mission. Evangelism was essential to the spread of the gospel for the early church, and it remains the vehicle for how the church will continue to grow. The term evangelism is used as a method by which the church readily engages with those who do not believe in Christ or affiliate as Christians.¹⁰ Evangelism means preaching, announcing, or otherwise communicating the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Delivering the message will help others come into a saving relationship with God.

The importance of training and developing others for Christian ministry can prove to be valuable to faith-based organizations and for-profit organizations.¹¹ The values obtained from biblical teachings equip believers for helping all people, even beyond the walls of the church.¹² These teachings provide believers with the essential tools for

¹⁰ Heidi Campbell, "The Distanced Church: Reflections on Doing Church Online," OakTrust Library, <https://oaktrust.library.tamu.edu/bitstream/handle/1969.1/187891/Distanced%20Church-PDF-landscape-FINAL%20version.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>.

¹¹ Vodricka L. Epps, "Equipping Ministry Leaders for Service at Mount Calvary Baptist Church," Digital Commons Liberty, <https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/doctoral/2400/>.

¹² Angelia V. Lewis, "Developing, Training, and Equipping Lay Ministers to Serve in Leadership Roles at Small African American Churches," Digital Commons Liberty, <https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/doctoral/3828/>.

serving their communities, working with others, providing for the less fortunate and witnessing to the lost.¹³ Through biblical training, members will develop the attitude and passion necessary to achieve the goals and mission of the organization. Training and developing members of the church using the scripture to serve others is the model exemplified by Jesus.¹⁴ There is a biblical mandate to properly equip them with the tools needed for the work God has called them to do.¹⁵

Synergy

The project will provide data and research identifying problematic areas of the church and concentrate on what is keeping Bethel from reaching its highest potential. Furthermore, a plan of action will be developed and tested to support the identified objectives and goals of the ministry. Spiritual growth should include a desire for a deeper biblical understanding and a clear path for creating and maintaining disciples for Christ. Developing disciples is the goal of the church in harvesting a mature and evolving congregation. Disciples are more likely to stay engaged and involved in ministry.

¹³ George Kiarie and Mary Mwangi, "Equipping Lay Leaders for Christian Ministry in the Anglican Church of Kenya Through Theological Education by Extension: Prospects and Challenges," *Missionalia* 48, no. 3 (2020): 257-273.

¹⁴ Joel R. Howard, "Creating a Leadership Development Strategy to Align and Equip Leaders at Grace Lutheran Ministries" (Dmin diss., Trinity International University, 2021), 31- 223.

¹⁵ Paul Chapman, *Equipping Members in Basic Discipleship Principles and Practices at Christian Community Discipleship Church in Prince George's County, Maryland* (Virginia Beach, VA: Regent University, 2020), 12-246.

Conclusion

There is a biblical foundation that supports the efforts and the purpose of a comprehensive plan for the local church. My intentions are to create a project that will identify and fill the voids that currently exist and prepare for any that can occur in the future. This project will verify there is a demand for a comprehensive plan for the local church. Additionally, it will share the structural construct, and the academic attention provided by the other models that have proven successful. Nevertheless, it will allow a more unified solution to the local church than the others. Simply by providing a model that is more focused and supportive of Christian education and Christian discipleship as the antidote to a declining and diminishing ministry. The objective of the proposed plan is to provide my context and others alike with a doable plan that will eventually encourage consistent structural management and continual Christian engagement for Christian service.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

The Bethel Independent Free Methodist church has lost several members and church attendance has declined tremendously over the last decade. Currently, the church is struggling with stimulating spiritual growth, drawing, and retaining new members, engaging its current members, and making an impact on its community. Over the years, the following have contributed to the causes of the continued decline: changing community, lack of outreach, limited resources, leadership opportunities, and societal changes. To prevent the church from further declining and possibly returning to a growing church, it is proposed that the Bethel Independent Free Methodist Church implement a plan of action that involves a model for church renewal. The goal is to rebuild and restore the Bethel Church to a thriving and vibrant church in the Mount Dora community. My theory is that if the Bethel church participates in this training model, then they will be prepared to experience long-lasting, sustained, and impactful church renewal.

The purpose of this biblical foundation chapter is to examine a passage of scripture from the Old Testament Book of Ezra. The aim is to provide a parallel and common thread between the story of the Jews returning to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple that had been destroyed by the Babylonians in 587 BC. Additionally, the goal is to

investigate and identify any proposed solutions that will aid in creating a plan of action to prevent the ongoing struggles of this ministry.

The Bethel Independent Free Methodist church has lost several members, and church attendance has declined tremendously over the last decade. There has been little effort to prevent this from continuing. Due to the impact of COVID-19, the church is finding it difficult to manage and survive in a post-pandemic era. It is proposed that the Bethel Independent Free Methodist Church engage in a project that encourages and outlines intentional efforts to address and overcome various challenges and obstacles that may have caused the decline to restore the church's vitality and relevance. Therefore, this section aims to use the Book of Ezra to provide a biblical foundation to support how church renewal and revitalization will be the proper way of addressing the concerns of the Bethel Church.

According to Ezra 5:11-12:

We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth, and we are rebuilding the temple that was built many years ago, one that a great king of Israel built and finished. But because our ancestors angered the God of heaven, he gave them into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar the Chaldean, king of Babylon, who destroyed this temple and deported the people to Babylon (Ezra 5:11-12).

The Book of Ezra, a seminal text in the Old Testament, delineates the odyssey of the Jewish people from their Babylonian exile back to Jerusalem, culminating in the monumental task of rebuilding the Jewish temple. This narrative, rich in historical and religious significance, is named after Ezra, a revered figure known for his multifaceted role as priest, scribe, and spiritual leader. His contributions, particularly in leading a contingent back to Jerusalem to resurrect the temple from its ruins, are pivotal in the narrative. Moreover, the text underscores Ezra's emphasis on communal activities and the

reverence for written documents, especially the law, marking it as a cornerstone in the portrayal of Judah's restoration.

This restoration is narrated in two distinct phases. The initial phase (Ezra 1–6) is bracketed by Cyrus' decree and the temple's dedication from 538 to 516 BC. The subsequent phase (Ezra 7–10) commences with Ezra's commission in the seventh year of Artaxerxes' reign, around 458 BC.¹ The narrative's genesis is marked by a decree from King Cyrus of Persia, which not only signals the cessation of the seventy-year Babylonian exile but also authorizes the return of the Jewish exiles to their homeland. This decree, set against the backdrop of Jerusalem and Judah's subjugation by Nebuchadnezzar in 605 BC and the subsequent deportations following rebellions in 597 and 586 BC, represents a pivotal turn of events. Cyrus' victory over Babylon in 539 BC and his subsequent proclamation to rebuild the temple, supplemented by financial and material support, is a testament to a significant epoch in Jewish history.²

Upon their return, the exiles swiftly reconstructed the temple's foundation and altar, resuming their ritual sacrifices. However, this endeavor is not without its tribulations. The builders face opposition from neighboring communities, leading to a cessation of the construction. This is a testament to the political and social challenges faced by the Jewish people during this period. The narrative then shifts to the prophetic interventions of Haggai and Zechariah, whose exhortations rekindle the rebuilding efforts. Their involvement is crucial in overcoming the hurdles posed by Tattenai, the

¹ Amy L. Balogh, ed., John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), 12-67.

² Douglas Mangum, ed., *Lexham Context Commentary: Old Testament* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020), 1-6.

regional governor, who questions the authority under which the temple reconstruction is being undertaken. The builders' assertion of Cyrus' decree is subsequently validated by King Darius, culminating in the temple's completion in 515 BC.³ This marks a significant milestone in the narrative, paving the way for a second wave of exiles led by Ezra.

The reconstruction of the temple, under the stewardship of Zerubbabel, a descendant of King David, and Jeshua, the high priest, symbolizes a renaissance of Jewish religious and cultural identity. Their efforts in resurrecting the temple, a symbol of their faith and heritage, are met with formidable opposition from neighboring peoples. These adversarial forces, employing political and physical threats, endeavor to thwart the reconstruction, thereby delaying its progress. Despite these impediments, the perseverance and faith of the Jewish people, bolstered by the prophetic voices of Haggai and Zechariah, ensured the resumption and eventual completion of the temple, its dedication symbolizing a reaffirmation of their covenant with God.

The narrative then introduces Ezra, arriving in Jerusalem during King Artaxerxes' reign. His arrival heralds a new era of religious reform and spiritual rejuvenation. Ezra's devotion to teaching God's law and instituting reforms, particularly concerning the issue of intermarriage with foreign women, is indicative of his commitment to preserving the purity of the Jewish community. This period of spiritual renewal, characterized by public confessions and celebrations such as the Feast of Tabernacles, underscores the community's rededication to God's laws.⁴

³ Mangum, *Lexham Context Commentary*, 1-6.

⁴ Balogh, *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, 12-67.

The Book of Ezra culminates with an enumeration of those who returned from Babylon to Jerusalem, emphasizing not only the physical restoration of the Jewish community but also the profound importance of religious observance and adherence to divine commandments. In summary, the Book of Ezra offers a comprehensive recounting of the return of the Jewish exiles, the reconstruction of the temple, and the religious reforms implemented by leaders like Zerubbabel and Ezra. It highlights the manifold challenges confronted by the returning exiles and underscores the paramount importance of steadfastness in faith and obedience to God's laws. This narrative serves not only as a historical account but also as a testament to the enduring spirit and resilience of the Jewish people in the face of adversity.

Exegesis

The exegesis of Ezra 5:11-12, in the context of church renewal, presents a fertile ground for exploring the interplay between historical narrative and contemporary spiritual praxis. This passage, rich in its historical and theological import, offers valuable insights into the process of spiritual revitalization, particularly in the context of a church community. The themes of renewal as a spiritual mandate and the restoration of a spiritual center are pivotal in understanding this process.

Renewal as a Spiritual Mandate

In Ezra 5:11, the exiles refer to themselves as "servants of the God of heaven and earth," a declaration that underscores their identity and purpose. This self-identification is not merely a statement of allegiance; it is a profound recognition of their *raison d'être*. In

the context of church renewal, this concept can be profoundly transformative. A church seeking renewal must first and foremost perceive itself as a collective of God's servants, with every endeavor rooted in this fundamental understanding. This perspective reorients the church's mission, placing divine worship and service at its core.

Renewal is not merely a process of structural refurbishment or programmatic realignment; it is an existential recommitment to God's purposes.⁵ In this light, the church's primary mission is crystallized to be a beacon of divine presence in the world. Renewal involves a deep, introspective journey to rediscover and reaffirm this mission.⁶ It necessitates a re-engagement with theological foundations, a re-examination of liturgical practices, and a revitalization of communal life, all undertaken to faithfully embody God's will.⁷

Restoring the Spiritual Center

The endeavor of the exiles to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem, as narrated in Ezra 5:11-12, symbolizes more than the mere reconstruction of a physical edifice. It represents the reclamation and restoration of a spiritual epicenter for the Jewish community. In parallel, church renewal involves a similar refocusing on the spiritual heart of the church. This process encompasses various dimensions.⁸

⁵ Thom S. Rainer, *Anatomy of a Revived Church* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2022), 30-126.

⁶ Rainer, *Anatomy of a Revived Church*, 30-126.

⁷ Laura Schmidt Roberts, ed., *Concern for Church Renewal: Essays on Community and Discipleship, 1958–1966* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2022), 86-142.

⁸ Balogh, *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, 12-67.

First, it involves a reaffirmation of core beliefs. Just as the temple served as a tangible representation of the Jewish faith, the doctrinal foundations of a church are central to its identity. “Renewal processes must engage with these theological tenets, ensuring that they remain relevant and resonant with the contemporary congregation while staying true to the church's historical and scriptural heritage.”⁹

Revitalizing worship practices is crucial. Worship, comparable to the temple services in ancient times, is where the divine and human intersect.¹⁰ Renewing worship practices might involve revisiting liturgical forms, incorporating diverse expressions of worship, and ensuring that worship remains a profound experience for the congregation, facilitating a deeper connection with the divine.¹¹ The role of the church as a spiritual refuge and community hub is paramount. The temple was not only a place of worship; it was a center of community life. Similarly, a church, in the process of renewal, must re-establish itself as a haven for spiritual nourishment and communal solidarity. This entails fostering a sense of belonging, providing avenues for spiritual growth and community service, and a source of comfort and guidance for its members.

Acknowledging Historical Roots

In Ezra 5:11-12, the exiles reference the temple's initial construction by a "great king of Israel," a recognition that serves as a poignant reminder of their rich historical

⁹ Wilbert Shenk, "The Priority of Mission for Renewal of the Church," *Die Mission der Theologie* (1998): 276.

¹⁰ Isidore Iwejuo Nkwocha, *Charismatic Renewal and Pentecostalism: The Renewal of the Nigerian Catholic Church* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2021), 46-214.

¹¹ John Maiden, *Age of the Spirit: Charismatic Renewal, the Anglo-World, and Global Christianity, 1945-1980* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2022), 47-243.

and spiritual heritage. This acknowledgement of the past forms a bridge between the then and now, infusing their present endeavors with a sense of continuity and rootedness. For a church embarking on a journey of renewal, this theme resonates.

“The act of honoring a church's historical roots is not merely a nostalgic remembrance of the past; it is an essential element in understanding its identity and mission.”¹² The church's founding principles, shaped by its early experiences and the faithfulness of its forebearers, are a wellspring of inspiration and guidance. By delving into its history, a church can rediscover the core values and vision that originally animated its community. This exploration can unearth a treasure trove of wisdom, resilience, and insights that are invaluable in navigating contemporary challenges.¹³

Moreover, acknowledging history provides a stabilizing force in times of change. Renewal, by its very nature, can be disorienting and unsettling for a congregation.¹⁴ Anchoring the renewal process in the church's historical narrative, leaders can offer a sense of continuity. This connection to the past reassures the congregation that while methods and expressions may evolve, the essence and mission of the church remain steadfast.¹⁵

¹² Shenk, “The Priority of Mission for Renewal of the Church,” 273.

¹³ Shenk, “The Priority of Mission for Renewal of the Church,” 270-281.

¹⁴ George Stephen Watson, II, "Introducing Ministry Leaders to the Personal Ministry of the Word at Renewal Church in Anderson, South Carolina" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2023), 8-43.

¹⁵ Benjamin Thomas Beswick, "Equipping Lay Leaders of Cape Bible Chapel in Cape Girardeau, Missouri, to Create a Community of Biblical Counseling" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2023), 17-98.

Furthermore, remembering and honoring the past can also catalyze spiritual renewal. The stories of past generations' faithfulness, struggles, and triumphs are not just historical accounts; they are testimonies that can inspire current members to persevere in their faith and commitment.¹⁶ They remind the church that they are part of a larger story, woven into the tapestry of God's redemptive work through time.¹⁷

In practical terms, acknowledging historical roots in the church renewal can take various forms. It can involve the preservation and celebration of church traditions that continue to hold meaning and foster a sense of belonging. It might include retelling the church's foundational stories and highlighting key moments and figures that shaped its journey. Educational initiatives, such as study groups or sermon series focused on the church's history, can also play a role in this process.¹⁸ Ultimately, by acknowledging and valuing its historical roots, a church can move forward with a renewed sense of purpose and identity. This awareness of its past becomes a compass guiding its future, ensuring the renewal process is grounded in a rich and meaningful legacy.¹⁹

Leadership and Vision

In the narrative of Ezra 5:11-12, the emphasis on the role of the "great king of Israel" in constructing the original temple highlights the critical importance of visionary

¹⁶ Frank Taylor, Jr., "Forged: Young Adults and the Renewal of the Church" by Austin Wofford," *Journal of Sociology and Christianity* 13, no. 2 (2023): 127-129.

¹⁷ Shenk, "The Priority of Mission for Renewal of the Church," 270-281.

¹⁸ Schmidt, *Concern for Church Renewal*, 86-142.

¹⁹ Xolani Maseko and Wim A. Dreyer, "Ecclesiological Renewal for a Relevant Ministry and Church Polity, with reference to UCCSA and UPCS in Zimbabwe," *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 47, no. 1 (2021): 1-13.

leadership. In the context of church renewal, the analogy is clear: strong, inspired leadership is pivotal. Church leaders are not just administrative heads; they are the stewards of the church's vision and spiritual health.

Effective leadership in a church renewal process is characterized by several attributes. First, it is visionary.²⁰ Just as the great king of Israel had a clear vision for the temple, church leaders must have a clear and compelling vision for renewal. This vision should be more than a mere strategic plan; it should be a prophetic articulation of God's desire for the church. It must resonate with the congregation, align with biblical principles, and be adaptable to changing circumstances.

Moreso, effective leadership is inspirational. Leaders must not only cast a vision but also inspire their congregation to embrace and work towards it. This requires a deep sense of conviction, infectious enthusiasm, and an ability to connect with people at a personal level. Inspirational leadership awakens a sense of possibility and ignites a collective passion for renewal.

Leadership in the context of church renewal should be exemplary. Leaders must embody the values and principles they advocate. Their lives should be a living testimony to the vision they are casting. This authenticity builds trust and credibility, essential ingredients for leading a community through a process of change.²¹ Moreover, leadership in church renewal must be collaborative.²² Just as the construction of the temple was a

²⁰ Janet Kay Bruner Faggart, "Discovering, Developing, and Deploying Emerging Ministry Leaders in the Assemblies of God," Digital Commons Liberty, <https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/doctoral/3514/>.

²¹ Glenn Packiam, *The Resilient Pastor: Leading Your Church in a Rapidly Changing World* (Ada, MI: Baker Books, 2022), 126-211.

²² Nell Collier, "Equipping Members of Greater Friendship Missionary Baptist Church to Enhance Their Leadership Skills" (DSL diss., Faith International University, 2020), 67-123.

collective effort, church renewal requires the engagement and participation of the entire congregation. Leaders should foster a culture of collaboration, inviting input, sharing responsibility, and empowering others to contribute their gifts and talents.²³

Most importantly, leadership in church renewal should be deeply rooted in spiritual discernment.²⁴ Leaders must be attuned to God's direction, seeking His guidance through prayer, scripture, and the counsel of wise advisors.²⁵ This spiritual grounding ensures that the renewal process is not just driven by human ambition but is aligned with divine will.²⁶

Facing Opposition

In the narrative of Ezra chapter five, the Jewish exiles faced formidable opposition in their quest to rebuild the temple. This theme of resistance is echoed in the context of church renewal. Just as the rebuilding of the temple was met with challenges, so too can the process of renewing a church encounter various form of resistance.²⁷

²³ Hilery L. Ward Jr., "Staying Alive! Reengaging Boomers in Second Adulthood Ministry: Guidance for 21st-Century Church Leaders," Digital Commons Liberty, <https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/doctoral/2460/>.

²⁴ Stephen Andrew Harrison, "Equipping Small Group Leaders of Grace Church in Eden Prairie, Minnesota, to Become Disciple-Makers" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2023), 56-71.

²⁵ Sithembiso Hlophe, "Ministry Formation of Emerging Christian Leaders: Equipping Emerging Leaders to Minister Among the Marginalized" (DMin diss. Asbury Theological Seminary, 2021), 13-76.

²⁶ Ronald Kent Wise, "Transformational Leadership: Equipping Small Churches to Make Disciples by Integrating Wesleyan Principals," Digital Commons Liberty, <https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/doctoral/2448/>.

²⁷ Bryan Cones, "The Fraying of the "Ecumenical Consensus" or a New Stage of Liturgical Renewal: A Case Study," *Studia Liturgica* (2024): 00393207231226167.

Understanding and navigating this opposition is critical for a church committed to transformation and growth.

Opposition to church renewal can manifest in numerous ways, both from within and outside the church community.²⁸ Internally, resistance often arises from a reluctance to change. Members may be attached to familiar traditions and practices, viewing any alteration as a threat to their comfort and sense of stability. External opposition can come from societal pressures, cultural shifts, or even regulatory challenges that conflict with the church's vision and values.

The key to addressing these challenges lies in a combination of perseverance and reliance on God's strength. Perseverance is crucial because the journey of renewal is seldom smooth or straightforward. It requires a steadfast commitment to the vision despite any obstacles that may arise. This perseverance, however, must be anchored in a deep reliance on God's strength and guidance. It is not merely a matter of human tenacity but a spiritual endurance nurtured through prayer, faith, and dependence on God.

Moreover, effectively addressing opposition often involves a strategic and discerning approach. This can include open communication within the church to address concerns and fears and create platforms for dialogue and feedback. For external challenges, it may involve engaging with community leaders, understanding societal changes, and finding ways to express the church's mission within the evolving cultural context.

Additionally, facing opposition with a Christ-like attitude is paramount. This involves responding to resistance not with defensiveness or aggression but with love,

²⁸ Paul Allan Clark, "The Church's Leader Training Challenge: More Than One way to Address the Need," *InSights Journal for Global Theological Education* 6, no. 2 (2021): 72-89.

patience, and understanding. It's about embodying the values of the Gospel even during conflict and challenge. The theme of facing opposition in the context of church renewal, as illustrated in Ezra chapter five, teaches that resistance is a natural part of any significant transformative process. By approaching these challenges with perseverance, reliance on God, strategic engagement, and a Christ-like attitude, a church can navigate through opposition and continue its path of renewal.

Focusing on God's Glory

The aim of the Jewish exiles in rebuilding the temple was to glorify God.²⁹ This objective is equally pertinent in the context of church renewal. Throughout the renewal process, the primary goal should be to honor and glorify God. This focus ensures that the efforts of renewal are not merely about institutional growth or adaptation to cultural trends but are fundamentally about reflecting God's character and purposes in the world. A church focused on glorifying God in its renewal process seeks to demonstrate His transformative power and love. This involves more than external changes; it encompasses a deep spiritual revitalization. The renewed church becomes a testament to God's grace, a place where His mercy, love, and holiness are palpably experienced.

Glorifying God in church renewal also involves aligning the church's mission and activities with God's kingdom values. This means prioritizing the things close to God's heart, such as justice, compassion, and the spread of the Gospel. It's about the church becoming a beacon of God's light in its community, demonstrating the impact of the Gospel through its actions and presence.

²⁹ Balogh, *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, 12-67.

Furthermore, a focus on God's glory necessitates a selfless approach to ministry. It challenges the church to look beyond its own interests and engage with the broader community in meaningful and transformative ways. This could involve social outreach, intercultural engagement, or environmental stewardship, all undertaken to reflect God's love and care for all creation.

Focusing on God's glory during church renewal, as reflected in the rebuilding of The temple in Ezra chapter five calls for a renewal process that is deeply spiritual. missionally aligned and selflessly oriented towards serving God and reflecting His character. This focus ensures that the church remains true to its divine calling and becomes a powerful instrument of God's grace and truth in the world.

Community Involvement

In the account of Ezra 5:11, the Jewish exiles exhibit a profound unity of purpose in their communal effort to rebuild the temple. This aspect of community involvement is a vital theme that resonates deeply with the concept of church renewal. The renewal of a church is not an endeavor that can be shouldered by a few individuals or leaders alone; it necessitates the collective engagement and commitment of the entire congregation.

The involvement of the community in the church's renewal process serves multiple purposes. Firstly, it fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility among the members. When individuals feel that they are an integral part of the renewal process, their investment in the church's future intensifies.³⁰ This sense of belonging and commitment is crucial for the sustainability of the renewal efforts.

³⁰ Sithembiso Hlophe, "Ministry Formation of Emerging Christian Leaders: Equipping Emerging Leaders to Minister Among the Marginalized" (DMin diss., Asbury Theological Seminary, 2021), 13-76.

Secondly, engaging the entire congregation ensures a diversity of perspectives and talents are brought to the table. As a body of believers with varied gifts and experiences, the church can benefit immensely from this plurality. Each member brings unique insights and skills that can enrich the process of renewal, whether it's through prayer, creative ideas, practical skills, or spiritual wisdom.

Collaborative decision-making is a key aspect of community involvement in church renewal. This approach not only democratizes the process but also mirrors the biblical model of the church as a body with many parts, each playing a distinct yet unified role. Through collaborative decision-making, the church can make choices that are more reflective of its collective wisdom and needs. Prayer and fellowship are the bedrock of community involvement in church renewal. Prayer aligns the church with God's will and invites His guidance and blessing on the renewal efforts. Fellowship, on the other hand, strengthens the bonds of community, fostering a spirit of unity and mutual support. These aspects are vital for maintaining the spiritual and relational health of the church during times of transition and change.

In summary, community involvement in church renewal, as exemplified by the exiles in Ezra 5:11, is about harnessing the collective power, wisdom, and faith of the church body. It is a journey undertaken together, marked by shared commitment, diverse participation, and a united purpose to grow and transform according to God's will.

Applying Ezra 5:11 to Church Renewal

Ezra 5:11, when applied to the context of church renewal, offers a multifaceted perspective on the process of revitalizing a faith community. This verse not only

underscores the historical and spiritual significance of the exiles' task but also serves as a metaphor for the church's journey of renewal. The first application of this verse is the rekindling of spiritual passion. Just as the rebuilding of the temple was a passionate response to a spiritual calling, church renewal should ignite a renewed fervor for God and His mission. This involves rediscovering the foundational truths of the faith, recommitting to personal and corporate worship, and fostering a vibrant, living relationship with God among the congregation.

Another crucial application of this verse is restoring the church's core values. The exiles were driven by a deep conviction to restore a vital aspect of their religious identity. Similarly, church renewal should involve a careful examination and reaffirmation of the core values that define the church's identity and mission. This process might entail revisiting doctrinal tenets, reviving forgotten traditions, or re-emphasizing neglected aspects of the church's calling.

Ezra 5:11 also teaches that the congregation's efforts should align with God's purposes. The rebuilding of the temple was a direct response to a perceived divine mandate. Likewise, church renewal should be firmly grounded in discerning and aligning with God's purposes. This requires attentive listening to the Holy Spirit, studying scripture, and seeking God's guidance at every step of the renewal process.

Ezra 5:11 provides a rich framework for understanding and undertaking church renewal. Its themes of faith, historical continuity, leadership, perseverance, and community involvement converge to offer a comprehensive guide for revitalizing a church. By rekindling spiritual passion, restoring core values, and aligning with God's purposes, a church can navigate the journey of renewal with clarity, conviction, and hope.

Summary

The biblical foundation, centered on the book of Ezra, amplifies the relevance of scriptural wisdom in guiding Bethel Church through its renewal journey. Traditionally attributed to Ezra, a priest and scribe, the book of Ezra is a seminal text in the Hebrew Bible, chronicling the journey of the Israelite community from their Babylonian captivity back to Jerusalem. This narrative, encompassing two distinct periods, the initial return under Zerubbabel and the subsequent return led by Ezra, spans nearly a century and is pivotal in understanding the post-exilic period.

Ezra's narrative serves as a crucial bridge between the Israelites' past and their future. It marks the end of Babylonian captivity and the beginning of a journey towards spiritual and communal restoration. The rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem was not merely a physical reconstruction but symbolized the renewal of the Israelites' covenantal relationship with God and the restoration of their national and spiritual identity.

In delving into Ezra 5:11-12, we uncover themes that are essential for church renewal. The communal effort to rebuild the temple, despite facing significant opposition, underscores the importance of collective action and unity of purpose in the church. It is a vivid reminder that transformative processes within a church require the inclusive involvement and contribution of all members.

Moreover, the narrative highlights the inevitability of obstacles in the path of renewal. Just as the exiles faced resistance in their endeavor, modern church renewal efforts often encountered various forms of opposition. A key lesson from this passage is to navigate these challenges with perseverance, faith, and reliance on God's strength.

The exiles' goal of glorifying God through the rebuilding of the temple resonates deeply with the contemporary church's mission. Church renewal should showcase God's transformative power and love, emphasizing the spiritual over the institutional. Additionally, the exiles' reference to the original temple and its historical significance illustrates the importance of acknowledging and honoring a church's history. This understanding of the past provides continuity, inspiration, and a sense of purpose in the renewal process.

Leadership, as depicted in the narrative, is another critical element. The role of visionary leaders, inspired by God's direction, is paramount in guiding and inspiring the community toward renewal. Such leadership is not only about strategic planning but also involves embodying the values and principles that the church stands for.

These themes from Ezra 5:11-12 provide a template for revitalizing a church community. They emphasize the importance of faith, historical continuity, collaborative leadership, and perseverance in the face of challenges. The exegesis encourages rekindling spiritual passion within the church, restoring core values, and aligning the church's mission and activities with God's purposes.

The Book of Ezra's theological significance lies in its affirmation of God's faithfulness and the importance of covenantal fidelity. It demonstrates that God keeps His promises, as seen in the Israelites' return to their land after seventy years in exile. This theme provides churches today with the assurance of God's steadfast presence and guidance, even in times of transition and uncertainty.

Ezra's leadership, particularly his focus on spiritual reformation and adherence to God's law, is also pertinent. It shows the vital role of spiritual leadership in guiding a community through times of change and renewal.

In conclusion, the study of Ezra 5:11-12 is foundational for understanding and implementing church renewal. The passage offers practical and theological guidance for revitalizing a church community, emphasizing community involvement, facing opposition with faith, focusing on God's glory, acknowledging historical roots, and the necessity of visionary leadership. These insights, rooted in the historical and theological context of the book of Ezra, provide a rich framework for contemporary church renewal, emphasizing the enduring relevance of Scripture in guiding modern-day Christian practice and belief.

CHAPTER THREE

HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

The Bethel Independent Free Methodist church (“Bethel”) has lost several of its members, and church attendance has declined tremendously over the last decade or more. There has been little to no effort to reverse the decline. Therefore, the church is possibly on the verge of becoming unsustainable and unable to serve this present age. In addition, the leaders of Bethel are not equipped to address many of the challenges the congregation is experiencing. It is proposed that the leaders of the Bethel Independent Free Methodist Church participate in a model of leadership training. By doing so, they will gain the skills and tools necessary to help revitalize their ministry.

Equipping leaders at Bethel Independent Free Methodist Church is essential for church renewal as it aligns with the biblical principles emphasizing the development of leaders within the faith community. The scriptures repeatedly highlight the importance of leadership training and the nurturing of spiritual gifts for the edification of the body of believers. Recorded in the Book of Ephesians 4:12, the Bible states, “Apply your mind to instruction and your ear to words of knowledge.” Over the years, the leaders at Bethel have neither participated in any leadership training nor have they expressed a desire to implement such training. As a result, many of the challenges the Bethel Church has faced have simply been ignored and ultimately unresolved. Now, the Bethel church is in dire need of a revival to save it from continuing to decline.

This historical foundation chapter examines a specific historical era in the Christian church, in which the Roman Catholic church was faced with similar challenges. The goal is to find the common threads that will improve our understanding and provide solutions that are valuable to this project. Certainly, this is not the first nor will it be the last time that churches experience challenges that threaten their growth and sustainability. Therefore, exploring the history of the Reformation movement will help church leaders and members understand many of the practices implemented today in the church that have proven to be beneficial. It will provide insight into the beliefs, practices, and values that have helped shape the identity of the church over time.

Additionally, this historical foundation chapter delves into a specific historical era in the Christian church, particularly focusing on the challenges faced by the Roman Catholic Church. It serves as a valuable exploration to enhance our understanding and derive applicable solutions for the current project. By examining a period in history when the church encountered challenges akin to those faced by our contemporary context, the aim is to identify common threads that can inform and improve our strategic approaches.

Again, the chosen historical era for scrutiny is the Reformation movement, a transformative period that witnessed the Roman Catholic Church navigating challenges to its established practices and doctrines. This exploration is motivated by the recognition that challenges to church growth and sustainability are recurrent throughout history. The Reformation, marked by theological debates, shifts in ecclesiastical power structures, and a quest for renewed spirituality, offers a reservoir of lessons applicable to present-day challenges. Analyzing the responses and strategies employed during this historical

upheaval can yield insights that may prove instrumental in addressing the current challenges faced by the Bethel Church community.

Furthermore, the study of the Reformation movement provides an opportunity for church leaders and members to grasp the roots of many contemporary practices in the Christian church. The Reformation, a broad and influential reform movement within Western Christendom in the sixteenth century, was a sweeping church reform movement in Europe that began in the same century.¹ By understanding the historical context of practices that have stood the test of time, leaders can gain a deeper appreciation for the enduring value of certain traditions and beliefs. This historical foundation chapter aims not only to draw parallels between historical and contemporary challenges but also to unravel the beliefs, practices, and values that have consistently shaped the identity of the Christian church. In essence, this exploration seeks to equip present-day leaders with a nuanced perspective rooted in historical wisdom, fostering a more resilient and adaptable approach to addressing the challenges of the Bethel Church community.

Established and organized in 1945 in Mount Dora, Florida, the Bethel Independent Free Methodist Church has a distinct origin rooted in the dissatisfaction of its founding members with the inner workings of the Mount Olive African Methodist Episcopal Church. Originating from the ranks of the Mount Olive church, these founding members, along with the pastor, opted to break away and establish an independent church due to persistent frustrations. This decision granted them the autonomy to forge their governing structure while preserving their Methodist beliefs.

¹ Aaron M. Moldenhauer, "Reformation," In *The Essential Lexham Dictionary of Church History*, ed. Michael A. G. Haykin (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2022), 622.

The founders intentionally crafted Bethel's structure to be independent, liberating it from hierarchy and episcopacy. The "episcopacy" is the system of Church government by bishops with spiritual authority tracing back to the apostolic era.² Records at Bethel emphatically state the church's divergence from Episcopal leadership, opting instead for a self-governing structure akin to other independent churches. This strategic move reflects Bethel's commitment to autonomy while upholding its Methodist principles, a testament to the church's resilient pursuit of its unique identity and governance model since its inception. Within the current operational framework, laypersons and the pastor jointly hold decision-making authority for the church at Bethel. This departure from the Episcopal structure signifies a shift, as clergy members no longer wield governing power. Instead, laypersons assume leadership responsibilities, steering the vision and trajectory of the church. Notably, this structure empowers them to determine both the selection of a pastor and the allocation of leadership roles within the organizational framework.

The governance model adopted by Bethel, although not unprecedented, presents unique challenges within the context of the Christian church. These challenges arise from the appointment of individuals to leadership roles who may lack the requisite preparation and expertise in church polity and governance. This situation sharply contrasts with the founding members of Bethel, who brought substantial knowledge acquired during their tenure in the AME church. Unlike these seasoned members, a considerable segment of the newer Bethel congregation may be unfamiliar with specific practices and protocols, particularly those stemming from their previous affiliation with the AME church. Despite potential deficits in experience, training, or specialized skillsets in this domain, many find

² F. L. Cross and Elizabeth A. Livingstone, eds., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 2005), 557.

themselves thrust into leadership roles at Bethel, posing a distinct challenge for the church community.

Over time, the failure to train and cultivate leaders has impeded Bethel's sustained growth and progress. While the church experienced intermittent seasons of growth, the inability to maintain this progress can be traced back to a deficiency in leadership. There exists an imperative need to cultivate experienced leaders within the Bethel community. Leaders who have not had the opportunity to manifest certain leadership behaviors or practices over an extended period may find themselves ill-prepared to confront the challenges currently faced by the Bethel congregation. Consequently, the overarching goal of this project is to address this deficiency in leadership training, offering insights into its significance for church renewal within the context of Bethel.

A pressing requirement exists to provide Bethel's leaders with the requisite skill sets essential for success. Ensuring that leadership training programs are intricately aligned with the specific needs and concerns voiced by the congregation becomes paramount for fostering effective church renewal. Proverbs 24:3-4 further underscores the critical role of wisdom and understanding in constructing a robust foundation. “By wisdom a house is built, and by understanding it is established; by knowledge, the rooms are filled with all precious and pleasant riches” (Pro. 24:3-4). Consequently, to prepare Bethel for the future, it becomes imperative to equip leaders with the essential tools and knowledge.

The Protestant Reformation

Therefore, the historical era that will support and aid in the recovery and renewal of Bethel is the Protestant Reformation movement. Studies and research prove the Protestant Reformation was a significant religious and social movement that forever changed the landscape and direction of Christianity. The Reformation was a complex historical movement shaped by the leadership of key figures who challenged existing theological doctrines, advocated for church reform, and, in some cases, established new branches of Christianity. The impact of their leadership continues to be felt in the diverse landscape of Christian denominations today.

The movement took place in Europe during the sixteenth century. Prior to the movement taking place, the Roman Catholic Church held significant power and influence over the lives of people, the community, and several parts of the world but then it started experiencing several challenges and criticisms. It has been recorded how the Roman Catholic Church was full of corruption and demoralizing practices and behaviors that were negatively impacting those who were participating members of the faith. Several of the church's behaviors were widely criticized, and several of the leaders within the church began to speak out against such practices. Such practices included but were not limited to the sale of indulgences, over-taxing of citizens, and the marginalizing of the less fortunate. It is crucial to note that the resistance, which ultimately achieved success, initially arose in response to practices designed to consolidate the overwhelming authority of the popes. This resistance, when it began, was specifically targeted against perceived instances of power abuse.³

³ Richard Watson, "Reformation," in *A Biblical and Theological Dictionary* (New York, NY: Lane and Scott, 1851), 814.

The question with which the Reformers struggled could be phrased this way: if the church in the late Middle Ages was not the hierarchical institution of Rome with its disappointing clergy, what was the church? The Reformers' common answer put the emphasis on believers. The church was the community of those who truly believed and had been justified by faith.⁴ The Reformers' poignant struggle with the question of the church's identity during the late Middle Ages resonates as a crucial juncture in Christian history. Their inquiry, encapsulated in the query of what constituted the church in the absence of the hierarchical institution of Rome and its perceived shortcomings, marked a pivotal moment of reflection. In responding to this existential query, the Reformers collectively underscored the centrality of believers. For them, the church transformed into a dynamic community defined by individuals who genuinely believed and had experienced justification through faith. This redefinition marked a departure from the institutional structures that had characterized the church, emphasizing a more intimate, personal connection between believers and their faith, mirroring the principles that Bethel Church seeks to instill in its leaders today.

During the late Middle Ages, the Reformers grappled with a pivotal question: if the church moved away from the hierarchical institution of Rome and its perceived shortcomings, what defined the essence of the church? This profound inquiry marked a crucial turning point in Christian history, symbolizing the Reformers' collective struggle to redefine the church's identity. Their response, centered on an emphasis on believers, portrayed the church as a community molded by individuals genuinely believing and justified by faith, signaling a shift away from institutional structures and emphasizing a

⁴ D. Jeffrey Bingham, *Pocket History of the Church* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2002), 121.

more intimate connection between believers and their faith. These principles resonate with Bethel Church's current values in cultivating leadership.

In evaluating the evolving needs of Bethel Church and its commitment to equipping ministry leaders, the Reformers' stress on the primacy of believers within the church community holds profound implications. It underscores the notion that effective leadership within the church is intricately linked to the authenticity of individual faith and a shared dedication to the fundamental principles of Christian belief. Drawing parallels between the Reformers' reconceptualization of the church and Bethel's goals for leadership development provides a deeper understanding. The Reformers' insights serve as a valuable lens through which Bethel can approach its mission, emphasizing not only the structural aspects and practices of leadership but also the transformative nature of individual faith within the context of the church community.

Involved in this moment were key figures who were all instrumental in the establishment of the Protestant Reformation. One of those leaders who is considered the main contributor to the main movement and possibly solely responsible for sparking the Reformation movement was Martin Luther, a German monk, and theologian. Reformation, usually spoken of as the great Reformation in the church, was begun by Luther in 1517.⁵

Martin Luther was not the author but became the accidental instigator of the Protestant Reformation through his famous protest about the abuse of indulgences in

⁵ Richard Watson, "Reformation," in *A Biblical and Theological Dictionary* (New York, NY: Lane and Scott, 1851), 813.

1517.⁶ Martin Luther became an excellent student and matriculated through his early education with minimum effort and soon earned both a bachelor's and master's degree. Additionally, while in school, he had a vision of one day becoming a law student. Unfortunately, these plans never became reality, and about a month into his legal studies, Luther was on his way back to school from his parent's home when he was caught in a violent thunderstorm. The storm grew more intense, and Luther testified that because of the magnitude of the storm, he became afraid for his life.

Martin Luther began to study the scriptures more, and later, he began to search diligently for how sinful man could be made right before God. Luther quickly became uncomfortable with the church's practices of taking advantage of others by using relics and other symbols of faith to do so. His disgust for the church's interest in wealth and political power started to become evident, and the question of indulgences continued to bother Martin Luther. In the autumn of 1517, Luther became concerned about the abuse of indulgences, certificates issued by the church that remitted punishments imposed as part of the medieval penitential system.⁷

In October of 1517, Luther wrote and distributed his *Ninety-five Theses*, in which, for one thing, he opposed the sale of indulgences.⁸ The history of Catholic indulgences is a highly controversial one that has led the church to reformation and eventually forced changes in how the Roman Catholic church approached indulgences later throughout history. The ability of priests to provide remission of sins predates the term "indulgence"

⁶ G. Tomlin, "Luther, Martin (1483-1546)," in *New Dictionary of Theology: Historical and Systematic* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 2016), 537.

⁷ Tomlin, "Luther, Martin (1483-1546)," 537.

⁸ Bingham, *Pocket History of the Church*, 112–113.

and has its roots in the early centuries of the Catholic Church. Over time, indulgences became standard practice throughout Europe in the Middle Ages and into the Renaissance. Luther's position basic complaint was that these certificates offered a form of cheap grace, and 'false assurance', encouraging people to trust in letters of indulgence rather than God's mercy. They encouraged Christians to avoid the true and painful contrition, which alone rendered the sinner receptive to God's grace.⁹

The concept of indulgences had its roots in the early Christian tradition of penance, where individuals would perform acts of repentance to seek forgiveness for their sins. Over time, this practice evolved, and the Church began to grant indulgences to alleviate the punishment associated with sin. The controversy surrounding indulgences played a pivotal role in shaping public opinion and creating a platform for broader challenges to the authority and practices of the Catholic Church. The Protestant Reformation aimed to reform these practices and restore what its proponents believed were the authentic teachings of Christianity.

The sale of indulgences became increasingly problematic as some Church officials abused it. Unscrupulous individuals began to exploit people's fears and ignorance by promising salvation or forgiveness in exchange for money. This practice led to corruption and a misunderstanding of the true purpose of indulgences. As a result, Martin Luther desired to change the status quo and reform the activities of the Roman Catholic Church. Luther argued that salvation and forgiveness could not be bought or earned through external acts but rather were dependent on faith in God's grace. He

⁹ Tomlin, "Luther, Martin (1483-1546)," 537.

believed that the sale of indulgences undermined the true message of Christianity and obscured the central role of faith in salvation.¹⁰

In 1517, Luther famously posted his *Ninety-Five Theses* on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany, critiquing various practices and doctrines of the Catholic Church. His actions sparked a widespread movement of reform and led to the formation of Protestant denominations that sought to return to what they believed were the original teachings of Christianity. The Protestant Reformation brought about significant changes in the religious landscape of Europe. It challenged the authority of the proven corrupted leadership and created a direction for the creation of alternative Christian traditions. This movement emphasized the importance of the Bible as the ultimate source of religious authority. This emphasis on scripture marks one of the other distinguishing points of Luther's theology. His focus on 'Scripture alone' as the final authority for Christian life and thought emerged from two distinct but related aspects of his early development.¹¹

The Protestant Reformation was important because it challenged the religious, social, and political order of its time. It opened the gate for religious freedom, individual interpretation of scripture, and the empowerment of individuals in matters of faith. Its influence extended far beyond the realm of religion, shaping the cultural, intellectual, and political landscape of Europe and laying the foundation for the modern world.

Luther's theology centers on the idea of Christ as a divine gift from God. According to Luther, the Christian holds onto the eternal pledge of God's favor and grace through the gift of Christ despite any accusations or feelings of abandonment. Christ's

¹⁰ Tomlin, "Luther, Martin (1483-1546)," 538.

¹¹ Tomlin, "Luther, Martin (1483-1546)," 539.

divine and human natures are seen as a unified substance, emphasizing that Jesus' life perfectly expresses the nature and heart of God. The incarnation, as God's gift of Christ received by faith, reveals God's identity as a generous giver rather than a demanding judge.

This Christological perspective profoundly influences Luther's view of God's communication with humanity. Justification, according to Luther, involves the promise and gift of Christ's righteousness received through faith. Because of the inseparability of Christ's divine and human nature, this gift takes on a tangible form, as seen in Luther's emphasis on the real presence of Christ in the elements of bread and wine in the Mass. The physicality of God's approach and availability is rooted in Luther's belief that the believer experiences a real union with Christ at an intimate level, where sin is exchanged for Christ's righteousness. The sacrament, as both preaching and physical elements, conveys God's promise in a tangible way, creating a genuine connection between the believer and Christ.¹²

Luther's theological principles, emphasizing Christ as a divine gift and the unity of his divine-human nature, have implications for effective leadership and equipping leaders at Bethel Church. These principles encourage leaders to center their leadership on grace, foster unity and inclusivity, communicate God's word effectively in tangible ways, be present and accountable, cultivate a culture of faith, and promote a generous spirit within the community. Applying these principles can contribute to a thriving and spiritually enriched congregation at Bethel.

¹² Tomlin, "Luther, Martin (1483-1546)," 540.

After the initial vigor of the Protestant Reformation, marked by transformative changes and the establishment of various denominations, the movement experienced a gradual loss of momentum in certain quarters. Over time, the diverse Protestant denominations faced internal challenges and external pressures, even Protestantism was experiencing a coldness, a deadness, a stagnancy. In many sectors, it had become nothing more than conventional orthodoxy, leading to a need for renewed attention and focus.¹³ The complexities of theological disagreements, differing interpretations of core principles, and internal divisions within Protestant communities contributed to a dilution of the movement's initial unity. As the Protestant movement evolved, it encountered external forces, including changing social landscapes and the rise of secularism, which necessitated a reevaluation of its strategies to maintain relevance and address contemporary challenges.

Similarly, in the context of Bethel Church's journey, there may arise moments when the initial momentum and enthusiasm for equipping ministry leaders need to be sustained and revitalized. As the church engages with the evolving needs of its congregation, external factors such as societal shifts and cultural changes may impact its effectiveness. The lessons from the historical trajectory of the Protestant movement can serve as a reminder for Bethel Church to remain vigilant, continuously reassess its strategies, and adapt to the ever-changing landscape to ensure that its commitment to leadership development remains dynamic and responsive. This recognition of the historical patterns within the broader Christian movement offers valuable insights for

¹³ Bingham, *Pocket History of the Church*, 137.

Bethel as it seeks to navigate its own path in equipping leaders and addressing the contemporary challenges within its unique context.

Nevertheless, the Protestant Reformation, a pivotal historical event in the sixteenth century, offers valuable insights and inspiration for contemporary leaders grappling with the ever-evolving challenges faced by the church. This analysis identifies several ways in which the Reformation can serve as a wellspring of inspiration. Ministry leaders today can draw lessons from the Reformation's call to embrace change and innovation. Figures like Martin Luther exemplified courage in challenging established norms, serving as catalysts for profound transformations within the church. In today's rapidly changing world, leadership demands adaptability and openness to innovative approaches in addressing challenges.

The Reformation's emphasis on the empowerment of individuals through the priesthood of all believers provides a second source of inspiration for modern leaders. This inclusivity can inform contemporary leadership strategies, fostering a sense of empowerment and active engagement among the congregation. Encouraging participation and recognizing the unique gifts of each member can significantly enhance the vitality of the church community.

Additionally, the Reformation's focus on cultivating biblical literacy serves as a third avenue of inspiration for present-day leaders. The Reformers prioritized making biblical knowledge accessible to the common people, a principle that leaders today can integrate into their strategies. Prioritizing biblical literacy within congregations facilitates a deeper understanding of scripture, equipping the congregation to face contemporary challenges with a solid foundation in Christian teachings.

Another aspect revolves around stewardship of resources. The Reformers challenged the excesses of the church hierarchy and advocated for responsible stewardship. Contemporary leaders can draw inspiration from this call for accountability and transparency in managing church resources. Implementing sound financial practices and ensuring responsible governance contribute significantly to the church's sustainability. The Reformation's commitment to core theological principles, such as salvation by faith alone, forms another area of inspiration for today's leaders. By anchoring their leadership in foundational theological principles, leaders can provide a clear and unwavering direction for the church amidst challenges.

Lastly, the Reformation's legacy of diverse Protestant denominations underscores the importance of promoting unity amid diversity. Modern leaders can glean insights from this diversity and work towards unity within the broader Christian community. Fostering collaboration and dialogue among different denominations can strengthen the church's collective impact.

In essence, the Protestant Reformation stands as a historical testament to the transformative power of visionary leadership, resilience in the face of challenges, and the significance of aligning the church with its core values. Contemporary leaders can find enduring inspiration in these principles as they navigate and address the evolving challenges within the church. In the context of a declining church, the Protestant Reformation is relevant and foundational for the work of revitalizing and reforming a church because it highlights the importance of addressing key issues and adapting to the changing needs of the faithful. Due to the lack thereof, many churches today will eventually face hardship and possibly decline in size and status.

The Bethel Independent Free Methodist Church desires to stay relevant and address concerns within the church, as demonstrated during the Protestant Reformation, to avoid further decline. Just as the Reformation sought to address corruption, conflict, and the chastisement, reconnect with the core teachings of Christianity, and make the faith accessible to ordinary people, a church aiming to revive from further decline can draw inspiration from these principles and practices exemplified during the Protestant Reformation.

By studying the methods employed during the Reformation, such as empowering individuals to engage with scripture, fostering a sense of community, and emphasizing the relevance of religious teachings to daily life, a church in decline can seek to reestablish its connection with its congregation. Additionally, the Protestant Reformation's emphasis on openness to change and adaptation can inspire church leaders to assess and update their practices to better meet the needs and expectations of the contemporary world.

As the Bethel Independent Free Methodist Church embarks on equipping leaders for church renewal, it is enlightening to draw parallels with historical movements such as the Protestant Reformation. Martin Luther's emphasis on the priesthood of all believers, transparent communication, and the transformative power of scripture laid the foundation for the renewal of the Church in the sixteenth century. Similarly, our commitment to equipping leaders reflects a timeless truth found in the scriptures and exemplified in historical movements. Just as the Reformation reshaped the course of Christianity through informed and dedicated leaders, our endeavors in leadership training are anchored in the belief that equipped leaders are catalysts for renewal, bringing about

positive transformation within the body of Christ. As we explore the lessons from the past, we are inspired to walk confidently into the future, empowered by the wisdom gained from historical and biblical foundations.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the historical tapestry of the Protestant Reformation, with its transformative leadership, emphasis on individual empowerment, commitment to biblical literacy, responsible stewardship, focus on core theological principles, and acknowledgment of diverse perspectives, forms a rich backdrop against which the present-day goals of Bethel Church can be illuminated. The echoes of Martin Luther's courage to challenge norms, the inclusivity of the priesthood of all believers, and the Reformers' prioritization of biblical knowledge resonate with Bethel's aspiration to equip its ministry leaders. Drawing inspiration from the Reformation's commitment to responsible stewardship, Bethel aims to instill a culture of accountability and transparency in the management of church resources, aligning with the lessons of the past for sustainable growth.

Moreover, the Reformation's unwavering commitment to core theological principles serves as a beacon guiding Bethel's leaders. Bethel seeks to provide a clear and steadfast direction for the congregation amid the complexities of contemporary challenges by anchoring their leadership in these foundational values. The Reformation's legacy of fostering unity amid denominational diversity imparts valuable insights for Bethel as it navigates its own diverse congregation. The call for collaboration and dialogue among different denominations aligns with Bethel's goal of creating a

harmonious and united community, strengthening its collective impact on the evolving needs of the church.

As Bethel Church endeavors to equip its ministry leaders, the profound historical lessons from the Reformation serve as both guide and inspiration. By synthesizing the enduring principles from this rich historical era, Bethel aims not only to address the challenges of today but also to forge a resilient and adaptive leadership that can meet the evolving needs of the church with wisdom, discernment, and faithfulness to its shared mission. The Reformation's impact transcends time, offering a timeless blueprint for effective leadership and church renewal, echoing through the corridors of history to guide Bethel's leaders in their noble pursuit of equipping the church for a flourishing future.

In summary, the intricate tapestry of the Protestant Reformation, characterized by transformative leadership, emphasis on individual empowerment, commitment to biblical literacy, responsible stewardship, focus on core theological principles, and acknowledgment of diverse perspectives, serves as a profound backdrop for understanding and illuminating the present-day goals of Bethel Church

The resonance of Martin Luther's courage in challenging norms, the inclusivity embodied in the priesthood of all believers, and the Reformers' dedication to biblical knowledge find echoes in Bethel's aspirations to equip its ministry leaders. Inspired by the Reformation's commitment to responsible stewardship, Bethel endeavors to instill a culture of accountability and transparency in managing church resources, drawing valuable lessons from history for sustainable growth.

Furthermore, the Reformation's unwavering commitment to core theological principles guides Bethel's leaders. Bethel aims to offer a clear and steadfast direction for

the congregation amidst the complexities of contemporary challenges by anchoring their leadership in these foundational values. The Reformation's legacy of fostering unity amid denominational diversity imparts crucial insights for Bethel as it navigates its own diverse congregation, aligning with the goal of creating a harmonious and united community.

As Bethel Church strives to equip its ministry leaders, the profound historical lessons from the Reformation serve as both guide and inspiration. Synthesizing enduring principles from this rich historical era, Bethel not only addresses the challenges of today but also aims to forge resilient and adaptive leadership capable of meeting the evolving needs of the church with wisdom, discernment, and faithfulness to its shared mission. The impact of the Reformation transcends time, offering a timeless blueprint for effective leadership and church renewal. This historical legacy echoes through the corridors of history, guiding Bethel's leaders in their noble pursuit of equipping the church for a flourishing future.

CHAPTER FOUR

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

The Bethel Independent Free Methodist church has lost several of its members, and church attendance has declined tremendously over the last decade. Currently, the church is struggling with stimulating spiritual growth, drawing, and retaining new members, engaging its current members, and making an impact on its community. Over the years, the following have contributed to the causes of the continued decline: changing community, lack of outreach, limited resources, leadership opportunities, and societal changes. To prevent the church from further declining and possibly returning to a growing church. It is recommended that the Bethel Independent Free Methodist Church implement a plan of action that involves a model for church renewal. The goal is to rebuild and restore the Bethel church back to being a thriving and vibrant church in the Mount Dora community. Unfortunately, the ministry leaders at the church are not equipped to change the trajectory of the church and implement a plan of this magnitude. Therefore, it is proposed that if the ministry leaders of the church, were equipped to address the evolving needs of the congregation, then the Bethel church will reverse the decline in the various areas of ministry.

In the contextual analysis portion of this project, it has been stated that the Bethel Church's foundational beliefs and practices were rooted in Methodism. Despite their

choice to separate from the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the founding members agreed to remain faithful to their Methodist roots. Therefore, the theological focus of this project will be on the life of John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement.

John Wesley (1703–1791) was an English cleric, theologian, and the founder of the Methodist movement. He played a significant role in the impact of church renewal, particularly during the eighteenth century, through his theological ideas, preaching, organizational efforts, and emphasis on personal and social holiness. He attended Oxford University and became a key figure in a group known as the "Holy Club," which focused on rigorous religious practices and the study of the Bible.¹

Theological Theme of Church Renewal

Church renewal stands as a theological concept deeply ingrained in the fabric of Christian tradition, representing a profound commitment to the revitalization, restoration, and transformation of the church.² It serves as a clarion call to renew spiritual vitality, reinvigorate mission, and revitalize ministry, ultimately culminating in the renewal of congregational life and impact.³ Throughout Christian history, the emergence of church renewal movements has been a recurring phenomenon, often in response to periods of

¹ Luke Tyerman, *The Life and Times of the Rev. John Wesley, MA, Founder of the Methodists: vol. I* (Norderstedt, UK: BoD–Books on Demand, 2023), 126-138.

² Steven Félix-Jäger, *Renewal Worship: A Theology of Pentecostal Doxology* (Chicago, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2022), 14-138.

³ Laura Schmidt Roberts, ed., *Concern for Church Renewal: Essays on Community and Discipleship, 1958–1966* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2022), 86-142.

stagnation, decline, or crisis, as believers strive to breathe new life into the body of Christ and amplify its witness in the world.⁴

At its very essence, the concept of church renewal finds its roots in the biblical portrayal of the church as the embodiment of Christ's mystical body and as the cherished bride of Christ.⁵ Embedded within these biblical metaphors lies a profound theological truth: the church is called to emulate the very nature and character of its divine head, Jesus Christ. Consequently, church renewal necessitates a fervent return to the foundational teachings of Christ, an unwavering reliance on the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit, and a resolute commitment to rediscover and rekindle the sacred mission and purpose bestowed upon the church by its heavenly bridegroom.⁶ The trajectory of church renewal encompasses not only personal transformation but also communal renewal, as believers collectively strive to reorient their lives, ministries, and congregations in alignment with the divine purposes of God.⁷ This communal aspect underscores the interconnectedness and interdependence of the body of Christ, wherein the renewal of individual believers catalyzes the renewal of the entire community, leading to the flourishing of individuals and the collective body of Christ. In delving deeper into the theological underpinnings of church renewal, it becomes evident that the process is complex and multidimensional, encompassing various theological themes and motifs that

⁴ P. L. Butzke, "Theological Aspects of Church Sustainability," *Sustentabilidad Files Wordpress*, <https://sustentabilidad.files.wordpress.com/2012/12/theological-aspects-of-church-sustainability-en.pdf>.

⁵ Jane Nkechi Ifechelobi and Kelechi Ihendu Onuoha, "The English Holy Bible: Language and Multiplicity," *Awka Journal of English Language and Literary Studies* 8, no. 2 (2022).

⁶ Florian Simatupang, "A Renewal Theology of the Eucharist: The Sacramental Process of Search-Encounter-Transformation" (PhD diss., Regent University, 2021), 9-25.

⁷ Robert Chao Romero, "The 'Browning Church' and God's Renewal," *Fuller* 49 (2021): 21-45.

converge to form a comprehensive framework for renewal. Among these themes, several key aspects emerge as foundational to the pursuit of church renewal.⁸

Christological Foundation

The essence of church renewal is anchored in a profound encounter with the person and work of Jesus Christ.⁹ At the core of this renewal process lies a rekindled devotion to Christ as the preeminent figure within the church—the head, the source of its life, and the ultimate model for its mission. Church renewal is not merely a strategic restructuring or organizational overhaul; it is a spiritual awakening that begins with a deepening intimacy with Christ.¹⁰

The renewal journey commences with a renewed commitment to Christ as the head of the church. He is the foundation upon which the church is built, the cornerstone that holds it together.¹¹ Thus, church renewal necessitates a return to Christ as the ultimate authority, the sovereign ruler whose lordship guides every aspect of the church's life and ministry.

Furthermore, church renewal involves recognizing Christ as the source of its life and vitality.¹² In John 10:10, Jesus declares, "I have come that they may have life, and

⁸ Valfredo Maria Rossi, "Carlo Passaglia on Church and Virgin: New Perspectives in Systematic Theology in Light of Nineteenth Century Catholic Renewal," in *Carlo Passaglia on Church and Virgin* (Boston, MA: Brill, 2020), 48-79.

⁹ Richard F. Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life: An Evangelical Theology of Renewal* (Chicago, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020), 9.

¹⁰ Ifechelobi et al., "The English Holy Bible," 42.

¹¹ Ifechelobi et al., "The English Holy Bible," 42.

¹² Amos Yong, *Renewing the Church by the Spirit: Theological Education After Pentecost* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2020), 12-37.

that they may have it more abundantly." The renewal process entails tapping into the abundant life that Christ offers—a life marked by spiritual vibrancy, vitality, and fruitfulness.¹³ It is a life that flows from an intimate union with Christ, the vine, from which believers draw sustenance and nourishment.¹⁴

Moreover, church renewal entails a passionate emulation of Christ's example of love, service, and sacrificial living.¹⁵ As the Apostle Paul exhorts in Philippians 2:5-8, believers are called to have the same mindset as Christ Jesus, who humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Church renewal involves embodying the selfless love, radical humility, and sacrificial service exemplified by Christ as believers seek to imitate his example in their relationships, ministries, and daily lives.¹⁶

The Christological foundation of church renewal is paramount, as it redirects the focus of the church back to its primary calling and purpose—to know Christ and to make him known. As believers deepen their intimacy with Christ, renew their commitment to his lordship, and emulate his example of love and service, they become agents of transformation in the world, embodying the very presence and character of Christ to a broken and hurting world.¹⁷ This foundational perspective is succinctly encapsulated in

¹³ Stephanie Perdew, "Fruits of the Liturgical Renewal Movement: Introduction," *Liturgy* 36, no. 3 (2021): 1-4.

¹⁴ Ifechelobi et al., "The English Holy Bible," 42.

¹⁵ Sarah Kathleen Johnson, "Free Church Worship: Renewed from Within and Beyond," *Liturgy* 37, no. 4 (2022): 40-46.

¹⁶ Shannan K Baker and Monique M. Ingalls, "The Musical Rhetoric of Charismatic Revival: Continuity and Change in the Songs of the Toronto Blessing and Bethel Church," *Journal of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity* 42, no. 1 (2022): 17-32.

¹⁷ Matthew Barrett, *The Reformation as Renewal: Retrieving the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2023), 12-25.

Paul's words to the Philippians: "I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death" (Phil. 3:10, NIV). Through this Christ-centered renewal, the church is empowered to fulfill its mission with renewed vigor and purpose, reflecting the transformative power of the gospel in every aspect of its communal life and outreach.

In conclusion, the Christological foundation of church renewal is paramount, as it redirects the church's focus back to its primary calling and purpose—to know Christ and to make him known (add scripture reference). As believers deepen their intimacy with Christ, renew their commitment to his lordship, and emulate his example of love and service, they become agents of transformation in the world, embodying Christ's very presence and character in a broken and hurting world.

Pneumatological Empowerment - Power of the Holy Spirit

Church renewal is fundamentally a divine undertaking, orchestrated and empowered by the Holy Spirit.¹⁸ As Paul writes in Romans 8:11, "But if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you." This pneumatological dimension of renewal emphasizes the indispensable role of the Holy Spirit in revitalizing and transforming the life of the church.¹⁹

¹⁸ Isaiah C. Padgett, "Empowered for Liberation?: Pneumatology as an Avenue for Dialogue Between Pentecostalism and Liberation Theology," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 31, no. 2 (2022): 261-278.

¹⁹ Selina Rachel Stone, "Holy Spirit, Holy Bodies?: Pentecostal Spirituality, Pneumatology and the Politics of Embodiment" (PhD diss., University of Birmingham, 2021), 5-26.

The renewal process is marked by a radical openness to the transformative work of the Spirit, which endows believers with spiritual power, equipping them to embody the fruit of the Spirit and exercise spiritual gifts for the edification of the body of Christ, as described in 1 Corinthians 12-14.²⁰ As Paul exhorts in Galatians 5:22-23, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things, there is no law." Through the empowering presence of the Spirit, believers are enabled to manifest these virtues in their lives and relationships, thereby contributing to the renewal of the church.²¹

Moreover, the Holy Spirit ignites a fervent passion for the kingdom of God within the hearts of believers, compelling them to seek first the kingdom and its righteousness as Paul discusses in Galatians 5:22-23. This passionate pursuit of God's kingdom fuels the church's mission and ministry, inspiring sacrificial service, courageous witness, and radical hospitality.²² As believers yield to the leading of the Spirit, they become vessels of God's transformative grace, embodying the values and priorities of the kingdom in their lives and communities.²³

Furthermore, the Holy Spirit orchestrates divine encounters that catalyze renewal and revival within the church.²⁴ Acts chapter two recounts the outpouring of the Holy

²⁰ Gloria L. Schaab, "Liberation Pneumatology: On the Unfettered Work of the Holy Spirit in the World," *The Heythrop Journal* 64, no. 3 (2023): 383-397.

²¹ Linus Pius Thliza, "The Relationship Between the Church and the Holy Spirit: Towards a Pneumatological Ecclesiology," *Jos Studies* 30 (2023), 7.

²² Geoffrey Butler, "Theologians of the Holy Spirit: A Pentecostal Analysis of John Calvin's Pneumatology," *McMaster Journal of Theology and Ministry* 22 (2020): 4.

²³ Mario Anthony Russo, "The Holy Spirit and the Story of New Creation: How Pneumatology Makes Sense of Cosmology and Eschatology," *Theology and Science* 18, no. 3 (2020): 505-516.

²⁴ Rob Yule, *The Holy Spirit as Person and Power: Charismatic Renewal and Its Implications for Theology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2020), 234-312.

Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, which resulted in the birth of the early church and sparked a movement of transformation and renewal that reverberated throughout the ancient world. Similarly, throughout history, the Spirit has continued to move in miraculous ways, initiating seasons of revival, awakening, and renewal within the church.²⁵

Generally, pneumatological empowerment lies at the heart of church renewal, as the Holy Spirit infuses believers with spiritual power, passion, and purpose, igniting a transformative movement of renewal and revival within the body of Christ. As the church surrenders to the leading of the Spirit and cultivates a posture of radical openness to God's transformative work, it becomes a vessel of God's grace and a beacon of hope in a world in desperate need of renewal and redemption.²⁶

Missiological Vision

At the heart of church renewal lies a renewed sense of mission and purpose, deeply rooted in the mission of God.²⁷ As theologian David Bosch eloquently articulates, "Mission is primarily and ultimately not an activity of the church, but an attribute of God.

²⁵ Jonathan D. Noble, "Pneumatological Ecclesiology: A Study of the Holy Spirit Within the Church" (PhD diss., Regent University, 2022), 7-34.

²⁶ Jason Lanker, "The Soul: Discipleship that Fosters an Integrated Soul," *Christian Education Journal* 16, no. 1 (2019): 122-133.

²⁷ Alan R. Rudnick, "NuBaptist: An American Baptist Vision of Spirituality, Ecclesiology, and Missiology for the Twenty-First Century," LaSalle University Digital Commons, https://digitalcommons.lasalle.edu/religion_thd/21/.

God is a missionary God."²⁸ The church's participation in God's redemptive work in the world is not optional but essential to its identity and calling.²⁹

The missiological vision of church renewal entails a radical reorientation of priorities and values, shifting from self-preservation to kingdom advancement.³⁰ This entails a recalibration of priorities, a reorientation of focus towards kingdom values, and a revitalization of missional zeal that propels the church into the world as agents of transformation and reconciliation.

Central to this missiological vision is the proclamation of the gospel—the good news of Jesus Christ.³¹ As Jesus commissions his disciples in Matthew 28:19-20, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." Church renewal involves a renewed commitment to proclaiming the gospel message with clarity, conviction, and compassion, inviting individuals into a life-transforming encounter with Christ.³²

Furthermore, church renewal entails making disciples—spiritual formation and nurture that lead to maturity in Christ.³³ This involves not only the initial conversion

²⁸ Anna M. Droll, "Conclusion: Dreams, Visions, and the Missiological Spirit," in *Dreams and Visions in African Pentecostal Spirituality* (Leiden, UK: Brill, 2023), 200-206.

²⁹ Stephen M. Davis, *Missiological Reflections on Life and Mission* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2022), 86-104.

³⁰ Michée Badé, "A Life-Changing Dream with Missiological Lessons," *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies* 18, no. 2 (2022): 61-65.

³¹ Bruce L. Bauer, "Principles to Guide an Adventist Theology of Dreams and Visions with Missiological Implications," *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies* 18, no. 2 (2022): 45-60.

³² Robert S. Heaney, "Public Theology and Public Missiology," *Anglican Theological Review* 102, no. 2 (2020): 201-212.

³³ Fred Farrokh, "Re-Ignitional Missiology in an Era of Decline," *IJPM* (2021): 28.

experience but also the ongoing process of discipleship, characterized by growth in knowledge, faith, and obedience to Christ. As Paul writes in Colossians 1:28, "Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ."

Moreover, church renewal encompasses the embodiment of the kingdom of God in word and deed.³⁴ The church is called to embody the values and principles of God's kingdom—love, justice, mercy, and compassion—in its life and witness.³⁵ This entails active engagement in acts of compassion, mercy, and justice that reflect the character of God and advance his kingdom's purposes in the world (Mi. 6:8).

The missiological vision of church renewal calls believers to embrace their role as co-workers with God in the redemptive mission of the world. It involves a radical reorientation of priorities, values, and practices grounded in the mission of God. As the church embraces this missional vision, it becomes a transformative presence in the world, proclaiming the gospel, making disciples, and embodying the kingdom of God in word and deed.³⁶

Embracing a missiological vision for church renewal also means recognizing and responding to the contextual realities of our world today, including the challenges and opportunities presented by globalization, technological advancements, and cultural

³⁴ Donald C. Grigorenko, "Whose Vision, Which Morality? Missiological Implications of Competing Local Moralities," *OKH Journal: Anthropological Ethnography and Analysis Through the Eyes of Christian Faith* 8, no. 1 (2024): 15-25.

³⁵ Zane Pratt, "Foundations of Missiology," *The Great Commission Baptist Journal of Missions* 1, no. 1 (2022).

³⁶ Lanker, "The Soul," 122-133.

shifts.³⁷ This requires a church that is not only biblically faithful but also culturally relevant, capable of engaging diverse communities with the gospel in ways that resonate with their unique contexts.³⁸ It demands a church that embodies a posture of listening and learning, willing to enter the complexities of people's lives with empathy and grace. By doing so, the church can effectively communicate the timeless truth of the gospel in a language that speaks to the heart of contemporary society. Such an approach not only facilitates the spread of the gospel across cultural and geographical boundaries but also fosters a more inclusive and embracing community of faith reflective of the Kingdom's diverse and global nature.³⁹ This adaptive and responsive posture is crucial for the church's mission to make disciples of all nations, as it seeks to navigate the rapidly changing landscapes of the twenty-first century while staying firmly anchored in its foundational mission to proclaim Christ crucified and risen.

Ecclesiological Identity

Church renewal requires a profound reexamination and reaffirmation of the church's identity and calling as the body of Christ.⁴⁰ It requires recognizing that the church is not merely a human institution but a divinely ordained community of faith,

³⁷ Pieter Verster, "The Future of Mission and Missiology in a Radically Changing World," *Journal for Christian Scholarship/ Tydskrif vir Christelike Wetenskap* 57, no. 3 (2021): 115-133.

³⁸ Nelus Niemandt, "Believing in the Future: Missiology's Future Prospects," *Missionalia: Southern African Journal of Mission Studies* 50, no. 1 (2022): 5-26.

³⁹ Allan Varghese Meloottu, "Let us be Friends: A Vision for a Better Global Missiological engagement," *Missiology* 52, no. 1 (2024): 44-46.

⁴⁰ Matheus Reis, "Brazilian Evangélicos in Diaspora in South Florida: Identity, Ecclesiology and Mission," Edinburgh Research Archive, <https://era.ed.ac.uk/handle/1842/39117>.

endowed with a sacred purpose and mission. At the heart of ecclesiological identity lies the recognition that the church is called to embody the love, unity, and diversity of the triune God—a reflection of the intimate communion shared within the Godhead.⁴¹

Central to church renewal is the reclamation of the communal nature of the church.⁴² The church is not a collection of isolated individuals but a vibrant community of believers bound together by a common faith and shared life in Christ.⁴³ As the Apostle Paul articulates in 1 Corinthians 12:27, "Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it." Church renewal involves fostering an authentic Christian community—a community characterized by mutual love, fellowship, and shared mission.

Moreover, church renewal entails nurturing a culture of discipleship within the faith community.⁴⁴ Discipleship lies at the heart of the Christian life, encompassing the process of growth, maturity, and transformation into the likeness of Christ.⁴⁵ As Jesus instructs his disciples in Matthew 28:19-20, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (ESV). Church renewal

⁴¹ D. Praas, C. A. M. Hermans, and Michael Scherer-Rath, "The Local Church and the Quality Narrative Identity of Ecclesiology in a Ricoeurian Perspective," *Churches in the Mirror* (2020): 9.

⁴² Timothy Mark Haupt, "The Palace Beautiful: The Evangelical Independent Ecclesiology of John Bunyan" (PhD diss., Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2022), 54-128.

⁴³ Jakob Egeris Thorsen, "The Christian Identity of Diaconal Work in a Secular Age of Authenticity," *Diaconia* 11, no. 1 (2020): 71-94.

⁴⁴ Lynndon L. Thomas, "Realizing Global Intercultural Ecclesiology Through the Cumberland Presbyterian Church" (DMin., Fuller Theological Seminary, 2020), 123-376.

⁴⁵ Dion A. Forster, "Baptism and Ecclesiology," *New Life in the Risen Christ: A Wesleyan Theology of Baptism* (2023): 215.

involves equipping believers to become faithful disciples of Christ, rooted in the Word of God, empowered by the Spirit, and committed to lifelong growth and obedience.⁴⁶

Furthermore, church renewal necessitates cultivating a culture of mutual care and accountability within the faith community.⁴⁷ Believers are called to bear one another's burdens, offer support and encouragement, and hold each other accountable in love. As the writer of Hebrews exhorts in Hebrews 10:24-25, "And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near." Church renewal involves fostering a climate of transparency, vulnerability, and mutual accountability, where believers can grow and flourish in their faith journey.⁴⁸

Ecclesiological identity lies at the heart of church renewal, as believers reexamine and reaffirm their identity and calling as the body of Christ.⁴⁹ It involves reclaiming the communal nature of the church, nurturing a culture of discipleship, mutual care, and accountability, and embodying the love, unity, and diversity of the Triune God.⁵⁰ As the church embraces its ecclesiological identity, it becomes a vibrant and transformative

⁴⁶ Joseph J. Flipper, "White Ecclesiology: The Identity of the Church in the Statements on Racism by United States Catholic Bishops," *Theological Studies* 82, no. 3 (2021): 418-439.

⁴⁷ Kimion Tagwirei and Maake Masango, "Rethinking the Identity and Economic Sustainability of the Church: Case of AOG BTG in Zimbabwe," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 79, no. 2 (2023).

⁴⁸ Ebenhaizer I. Nuban Timo, Agus Santoso, and Bobby Kurnia Putrawan, "Protestant Church of Maluku Ecclesiology: From Calvinism to Fuse to Become Pancasilaism," *Toronto Journal of Theology* 37, no. 2 (2021): 188-197.

⁴⁹ Michael Schlatt, *Toward A Public Ecclesiology For The Evangelical Church: Embodying Our Biblical Identity* (Wilmore, KY: First Fruits Press 2021), 245.

⁵⁰ Alan R. Rudnick, "NuBaptist: An American Baptist Vision of Spirituality, Ecclesiology, and Missiology for the Twenty-First Century," LaSalle University Digital Commons, https://digitalcommons.lasalle.edu/religion_thd/21/.

presence in the world, fulfilling its sacred mission to proclaim the gospel, make disciples, and advance the kingdom of God.⁵¹

Sacramental Life

Integral to the process of church renewal is the cultivation of a vibrant sacramental life that serves as a source of sustenance and nourishment for the faith community.⁵² The sacraments instituted by Christ stand as visible signs of God's grace, tangible expressions of God's presence, and conduits of spiritual nourishment for believers.⁵³ Church renewal necessitates a revitalization of the sacramental imagination—a rekindling of awe and reverence for the sacred mysteries conferred through the sacraments.⁵⁴

The sacraments are not mere symbols but tangible encounters with the divine presence.⁵⁵ Through the sacraments, believers are invited into communion with God, experiencing God's grace and love in a tangible and transformative way.⁵⁶ As the Apostle

⁵¹ Praas, Hermans, and Scherer-Rath, "The Local Church and the Quality Narrative," 9.

⁵² Kyle Kenneth Schiefelbein-Guerrero, "Whether One May Flee From Digital Worship: Reflections on Sacramental Ministry in a Public Health Crisis," *Dialog* 59, no. 2 (2020): 49-55.

⁵³ James R. Gordon, "Theologies of Sacraments in the Eighteenth to Twenty-First Centuries," in *Christian Theologies of the Sacraments: A Comparative Introduction* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2020), 261-270.

⁵⁴ Chao, "The 'Browning Church' and God's Renewal," 21-45.

⁵⁵ Michael Ward, "Baptized by Blackness: Manumitted Baptisms in Antebellum Georgia and Black Catholicism's Sacramental Subversion of an Antiblack World" (PhD diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2023), 149.

⁵⁶ Paweł Lewandowski, "The Obligation to Lead a Holy Life for Those Dispensed from Celibacy," *Repozytorium*, <https://repozytorium.kul.pl/server/api/core/bitstreams/1eca1210-9108-4954-a2cb-2e56f8a059ea/content>.

Peter writes in 1 Peter 3:21, baptism is "not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God." Likewise, in the Eucharist, believers partake of the body and blood of Christ, experiencing communion with Christ and with one another, as described in 1 Corinthians 11:23-26.

Church renewal involves a renewed appreciation for the transformative power of the sacraments.⁵⁷ Through baptism, believers are initiated into the family of God, adopted as sons and daughters, and united with Christ in His death and resurrection as explained in Romans 6:3-4. 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 states that in the Eucharist, believers are nourished and strengthened by the spiritual food of Christ's body and blood, experiencing spiritual sustenance and renewal.

Moreover, church renewal entails a deliberate cultivation of sacred rituals and practices that foster spiritual growth and deepen communion with God and one another. The sacraments serve as focal points for worship, prayer, and community life within the faith community.⁵⁸ Through the sacraments, believers are invited into sacred moments of encounter with God, where God's presence is tangibly felt, abundantly bestowed, and God's love is profoundly experienced. The cultivation of a vibrant sacramental life lies at the heart of church renewal. The sacraments serve as tangible expressions of God's grace, channels of divine presence, and means of spiritual nourishment for believers.⁵⁹ As the church embraces the transformative power of the sacraments and cultivates sacred rituals

⁵⁷ Edward Foley, ed., *Developmental Disabilities and Sacramental Access: New Paradigms for Sacramental Encounters* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2020), 65-154.

⁵⁸ Jason Lanker, "The Soul: Discipleship that Fosters an Integrated Soul" *Christian Education Journal* 16, no. 1 (2019): 122-133.

⁵⁹ Lanker, "The Soul," 122-133.

and practices that foster spiritual growth and deepen communion with God and one another, it becomes a vibrant and transformative presence in the world, embodying the love, grace, and mercy of Christ to a broken and hurting world.⁶⁰

In essence, church renewal represents a profound theological journey—a sacred pilgrimage of the soul—as believers collectively seek to reclaim the timeless truths of the gospel, reinvigorate the life of the church, and reimagine God's transformative work in the world. It is a journey marked by faith-filled surrender, fervent prayer, courageous innovation, and radical obedience to the leading of the Holy Spirit. As the church embarks on this sacred journey of renewal, may it be empowered by the grace of God, guided by the wisdom of Christ, and enlivened by the presence of the Holy Spirit as it seeks to fulfill its sacred calling as the radiant bride of Christ, shining brightly in a world in desperate need of renewal and redemption.

John Wesley

John Wesley had a significant impact on the early church, particularly through his role as the founder of the Methodist movement. His influence on the early church can be seen in several ways. John Wesley along with his brother Charles Wesley, started the Methodist movement in the eighteenth century in England. The movement initially sought to revitalize the Anglican Church but eventually developed into a separate religious tradition.⁶¹ Wesley's leadership and theological insights laid the foundation for

⁶⁰ Jana M. Bennett, "Living the Eighth Day Online: Liturgies, Sacramental Life, and Building Human Relationships," *Theology and Sexuality* 26, no. 2-3 (2020): 123-139.

⁶¹ Tyerman, *The Life and Times of the Rev. John Wesley*, 126-138.

Methodism as an independent denomination. His theological teachings, often referred to as Wesleyan theology, emphasized the importance of a personal experience of faith, holiness, and social responsibility. He stressed the idea of "Christian perfection" or sanctification, which meant striving for a life of holiness and love. This doctrinal emphasis influenced the early church by promoting a deeper, more experiential faith.⁶²

John Wesley was an advocate for social justice and practical Christianity. He encouraged early Methodists to engage in acts of mercy and works of charity. This commitment to social outreach and the betterment of society was a distinguishing feature of the early church influenced by Wesley. He was a proponent of education and established institutions like Kingswood School and Trevecca College to train Methodist ministers.⁶³ These institutions contributed to the education and training of clergy in the early church. John Wesley's impact on the early church was characterized by his zeal for evangelism, theological insights, emphasis on personal piety, and the creation of a strong sense of community. These elements, combined with his commitment to social engagement, left a legacy that significantly shaped the early Methodist movement and influenced other denominations as well. Wesley's ideas and methods continue to resonate with many Christians to this day.

To show connectivity and why John Wesley and his contributions are key to this project, several key contributions made by John Wesley to church renewal and church growth will be discussed. Wesley's theological views were influenced by Arminianism, a

⁶² Tyerman, *The Life and Times of the Rev. John Wesley*, 126-138.

⁶³ John Wesley, *The Works of the Rev. John Wesley*, vol. 5 (Norderstedt, UK: Books on Demand, 2023), 61-154.

theology that emphasizes human free will and God's universal offer of salvation. He believed in prevenient grace, which means that God's grace precedes and enables an individual's response to salvation. Wesley was known for his itinerant preaching, traveling extensively throughout England and beyond to spread the gospel. He preached in fields, marketplaces, and open spaces, often reaching people who were not attending traditional church services. Wesley stressed the importance of "Christian perfection" or "entire sanctification," which refers to a state of holy living and complete devotion to God.⁶⁴ He believed that Christians could experience gradual growth in holiness through the work of the Holy Spirit. Wesley organized small group meetings called "class meetings" and "bands." These groups provided a structured environment for accountability, spiritual growth, and mutual support. Participants shared their spiritual experiences, struggles, and victories, fostering a sense of community.

John Wesley believed that faith should be expressed through works of compassion and justice. He engaged in various social causes, including prison reform, education, and care for the poor. His emphasis on social engagement helped address the needs of the marginalized and contributed to a holistic view of Christian discipleship. To sustain the growing Methodist movement, Wesley established a circuit system that utilized lay preachers to minister to various communities. This organizational structure allowed for regular pastoral care and teaching in areas that lacked sufficient clergy.⁶⁵

When it comes to Church Revival and Church Renewal, Wesley's preaching and teaching played a significant role in the revivalist movements of the 18th century,

⁶⁴ Tyerman, *The Life and Times of the Rev. John Wesley*, 126-138.

⁶⁵ Wesley, *The Works of the Rev. John Wesley*, 61-154.

including the First Great Awakening in Britain and America.⁶⁶ He saw his work as a means of renewing the Church and bringing individuals to a deeper and more personal relationship with God.⁶⁷ John Wesley's contributions led to a renewal of spiritual fervor, a commitment to social justice, and the formation of the Methodist movement. His emphasis on personal holiness, evangelistic fervor, and social engagement significantly impacted the landscape of Christianity during his time and beyond. Wesley's legacy continues to influence modern Methodism and various other Christian denominations.

John Wesley had a distinctive approach to church growth that contributed to the rapid expansion of Methodism in the eighteenth century. One of Wesley's most notable strategies was field preaching. He and his preachers traveled extensively, often on horseback, to reach people in rural areas and industrial towns. They preached in open fields, marketplaces, and other public spaces, making the gospel accessible to those who did not attend traditional church services. Additionally, Wesley recognized the importance of close-knit, small-group gatherings. He organized societies and classes where individuals met regularly to discuss their spiritual lives, provide mutual support, and hold each other accountable.⁶⁸ Class meetings were more focused on spiritual examination, while bands were more intimate and intended for deep, personal sharing.

John Wesley trained and sent out itinerant preachers, often referred to as "circuit riders," who traveled to different communities to spread the Methodist message. This

⁶⁶ Wesley, *The Works of the Rev. John Wesley*, 61-154.

⁶⁷ Matthew Lelievre, *John Wesley: His Life and His Work* (Norderstedt, UK: Books on Demand, 2023), 111-214.

⁶⁸ Lelievre, *John Wesley*, 111-214.

approach ensured that Methodism reached areas that were underserved by other churches and allowed for more direct and personal interaction with people. Methodists were encouraged to engage in social outreach and community service. This practical expression of faith often helped address pressing social issues, such as poverty, education, and healthcare. This approach contributed to the positive perception of Methodism in communities.⁶⁹

Wesley understood the power of music in worship and evangelism. He and his brother Charles Wesley wrote numerous hymns, many of which are still sung today. These hymns helped create a sense of community and a shared Methodist identity. Also, John Wesley emphasized a clear and practical theology. His "Methodist Quadrilateral" consisted of scripture, tradition, reason, and experience as sources of authority for understanding and practicing the Christian faith. This emphasis on a holistic understanding of faith was appealing to many. A combination of effective evangelism, a strong sense of community, and a commitment to social justice characterized John Wesley's approach to church growth. His methods had a significant impact on the growth of the Methodist movement and played a crucial role in shaping the modern Methodist Church and other Methodist denominations.⁷⁰

Wesley implemented a system of accountability and discipline within the Methodist societies. Members were expected to live by certain moral standards and regularly report on their spiritual progress in class meetings. This system helped maintain a sense of order and commitment within the movement. He was open to adapting his

⁶⁹ Lelievre, *John Wesley*, 111-214.

⁷⁰ Lelievre, *John Wesley*, 111-214.

methods to changing circumstances and needs. He was willing to experiment and adjust his approach to reach different groups and address evolving challenges.⁷¹

John Wesley's theology continues to have a profound impact on contemporary Christianity, particularly within the Methodist tradition, but also in broader Christian circles. Wesley emphasized the importance of a personal, experiential relationship with God. This emphasis on a heartwarming, transformative encounter with God continues to influence contemporary Christian spirituality, as many Christians seek a deeper, personal connection with their faith. His doctrine of Christian perfection and sanctification is still a significant aspect of Wesleyan theology. It encourages Christians to strive for holiness and to grow in love and grace throughout their lives. This emphasis on holiness remains relevant in Christian discussions on personal growth and spiritual development. The Wesleyan emphasis on evangelism and outreach is still relevant in contemporary church growth strategies. Churches and denominations, both within and outside the Methodist tradition, draw from Wesley's passion for spreading the gospel and reaching out to the unchurched. Wesley's theological writings, including his sermons and commentaries, continue to be studied and referenced by theologians and scholars. His thought provides a rich resource for theological reflection and discussion in the contemporary church.⁷²

John Wesley's theology has left a lasting impact on various aspects of contemporary Christianity, influencing personal spirituality, social engagement, church practices, and theological discussions. While his ideas evolved and adapted over time,

⁷¹ Lelievre, *John Wesley*, 111-214.

⁷² Lelievre, *John Wesley*, 111-214.

they continue to inform and inspire the faith and practices of many Christians, particularly within the Methodist tradition and other Wesleyan-influenced denominations.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the journey of church renewal is a sacred pilgrimage—a spiritual odyssey marked by faith-filled surrender, fervent prayer, and radical obedience to the leading of the Holy Spirit. Through the theological exploration of key themes such as Christological foundation, pneumatological empowerment, missiological vision, ecclesiological identity, and sacramental life, we have uncovered the multifaceted nature of church renewal as a divine undertaking empowered by God's grace and guided by His purposes.

Church renewal calls us to a profound reexamination and reaffirmation of our identity and calling as the body of Christ—a community of faith called to embody the love, unity, and diversity of the Triune God. It beckons us to a renewed commitment to Christ as the head of the church, the source of its life, and the ultimate model for its mission. It invites us to a radical openness to the transformative work of the Holy Spirit, who empowers believers to embody the fruit of the Spirit, exercise spiritual gifts, and engage in transformative ministry.

Moreover, church renewal compels us to embrace a missiological vision grounded in God's mission—to proclaim the gospel, make disciples, and embody the kingdom of God in word and deed. It challenges us to cultivate a vibrant sacramental life that sustains and nourishes the faith community, enabling believers to encounter God's grace and presence in tangible and transformative ways.

In the footsteps of John Wesley, whose theological insights and methodological innovations continue to inspire and shape the church today, we are called to embrace a holistic vision of church renewal—one that encompasses personal transformation, communal renewal, and societal transformation. As we journey forward, may we be empowered by the grace of God, guided by the wisdom of Christ, and enlivened by the presence of the Holy Spirit, as we seek to fulfill our sacred calling as the radiant bride of Christ, shining brightly in a world in desperate need of renewal and redemption.

CHAPTER FIVE

INTERDISCIPLINARY FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

In this interdisciplinary exploration, I focus on the realm of transformative leadership, leveraging insights from the field of business management and leadership theory to address the problem statement of the doctoral hypothesis. The focus lies on transformative leadership theory, which finds its roots in organizational studies, offering a robust framework for comprehending how leaders can ignite change within their respective contexts.¹ The rationale behind this choice is complex. Firstly, transformative leadership theory provides a rich reservoir of concepts and practices proven effective in fostering organizational renewal, making it a pertinent lens through which to examine issues of church revitalization. Secondly, its interdisciplinary nature facilitates the integration of diverse perspectives and methodologies, enabling a comprehensive understanding of the complex dynamics at play within ecclesiastical settings.²

By applying transformative leadership theory to the project problem, I aspire to unearth actionable insights and recommendations tailored to the specific context of the

¹ Bernard M. Bass, "Two Decades of Research and Development in Transformational Leadership," *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology* 8, no. 1 (1999): 9-32.

² Peter G. Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice* (Washington DC: Sage Publications, 2021), 246-401.

Bethel Church community. This interdisciplinary approach promises to offer fresh perspectives and innovative strategies for addressing the complex challenges inherent in church renewal initiatives. Moreover, it underscores the significance of cross-disciplinary collaboration in generating holistic solutions to complex problems.³ Through a synthesis of business management principles and theological considerations, I aim to explain the intersections between organizational dynamics, leadership practices, and spiritual renewal within the Bethel Church community.

The integration of transformative leadership theory into the project framework enriches the understanding of leadership dynamics and enhances the ability to navigate the particulars of church revitalization efforts.⁴ By drawing parallels between organizational renewal in secular contexts and the imperatives of ecclesiastical revitalization, people can glean valuable insights that transcend disciplinary boundaries. This interdisciplinary endeavor holds the potential to inspire innovative approaches, challenge conventional paradigms, and catalyze transformative change within the Bethel Church community and beyond.

Generally, exploring transformative leadership theory within the context of organizational renewal offers a synergistic blend of theoretical rigor, practical applicability, and theological insight. Grounded in the interdisciplinary ethos of the doctoral program, this endeavor exemplifies the transformative potential of cross-disciplinary collaboration in addressing the complex challenges facing contemporary

³ Iain Hay, *Qualitative Research Methods in Human Geography* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2010), 123-368.

⁴ Gary Yukl, "Leadership," *Cases in Leadership* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2012), 1-42.

religious communities. By integrating diverse perspectives and methodologies, I endeavor to chart a course toward renewal, vitality, and relevance within the Bethel Church community, guided by the principles of transformative leadership theory.

Transformative Leadership Theory

Transformative leadership theory is rooted in the field of leadership studies and presents a comprehensive framework for understanding and practicing leadership that inspires positive change and transformation within organizations and communities.⁵ Developed initially by James MacGregor Burns in his seminal work "Leadership," transformative leadership theory has since evolved and gained prominence as a significant approach to leadership across various domains, including business, education, politics, and religion.⁶

At its core, transformative leadership theory posits that effective leaders have the capacity to inspire and motivate followers to transcend their self-interests for the greater good of the organization or society.⁷ Unlike transactional leadership, which focuses on exchanging rewards for compliance, transformative leadership emphasizes the importance of raising followers' consciousness, fostering empowerment, and promoting collective action toward shared goals.⁸

⁵ Northouse, *Leadership*, 246-401.

⁶ Northouse, *Leadership*, 246-401.

⁷ Carolyn M. Shields and Kristina A. Hesbol, "Transformative Leadership Approaches to Inclusion, Equity, and Social Justice" (2020): 3-22.

⁸ Northouse, *Leadership*, 246-401.

One of the key components of transformative leadership is the concept of vision casting. Transformative leaders articulate a compelling vision that inspires and mobilizes their followers toward a shared goal or purpose.⁹ Leaders can galvanize collective action and foster a sense of purpose and direction among followers by aligning individual aspirations with the broader organizational vision. Moreover, transformative leadership theory emphasizes the empowerment of individuals and the promotion of collaboration and participation within organizations.¹⁰ Leaders who practice transformative leadership delegate authority, encourage autonomy and create opportunities for followers to contribute their unique talents and perspectives to achieve organizational objectives.

Transformative leaders prioritize the development of trust and authenticity in their relationships with followers.¹¹ By demonstrating integrity, transparency, and empathy; leaders can build trust and foster a positive organizational culture conducive to innovation, growth, and resilience. Furthermore, transformative leadership theory underscores the importance of organizational renewal, whereby leaders initiate transformative changes within their organizations to adapt to changing circumstances and achieve desired goals.¹² Leaders who practice transformative leadership are proactive in identifying areas for improvement, challenging the status quo, and fostering a culture of continuous learning and adaptation.

⁹ Bass, "Two Decades of Research and Development," 9-32.

¹⁰ Northouse, *Leadership*, 246-401.

¹¹ Bass, "Two Decades of Research and Development," 9-32.

¹² Northouse, *Leadership*, 246-401.

Transformative leadership theory has been widely utilized in various contexts to drive positive change and transformation. In business settings, transformative leaders have been credited with leading organizational turnarounds, fostering innovation, and promoting employee engagement and satisfaction.¹³ In education, transformative leadership has been applied to promote school improvement, enhance student achievement, and cultivate a positive learning environment.¹⁴ Moreover, transformative leadership theory has significant implications for political leadership and social movements. Leaders who practice transformative leadership have played pivotal roles in advocating for social justice, promoting democracy, and mobilizing grassroots support for change.

Generally, transformative leadership theory offers a comprehensive framework for understanding and practicing leadership that inspires positive change and transformation within organizations and communities. Originating from the work of James MacGregor Burns, transformative leadership theory emphasizes vision casting, empowerment, collaboration, trust-building, and organizational renewal as key components of effective leadership. With applications across various domains, transformative leadership has the potential to drive positive change and create a more equitable, just, and sustainable world.¹⁵

¹³ Bass, "Two Decades of Research and Development," 9-32.

¹⁴ Shields and Hesbol, "Transformative Leadership Approaches to Inclusion, Equity, and Social Justice," (2020): 3-22.

¹⁵ Northouse, *Leadership*, 246-401.

Engagement of the Theory with Project Problem

Transformative leadership theory, rooted in the concept of inspiring and motivating change within organizations, serves as a potent analytical framework for addressing the project problem of church renewal within the Bethel Church community.¹⁶ At its core, transformative leadership theory emphasizes the importance of leaders in articulating a compelling vision, fostering innovation, and empowering individuals to contribute to organizational change.¹⁷ Within the context of ecclesiastical settings, this theory holds particular relevance as church leaders strive to navigate the complexities of cultural shifts, dwindling engagement, and evolving spiritual needs.

In examining the project problem through the lens of transformative leadership theory, I recognize the pivotal role of church leaders in inspiring and mobilizing their congregation toward a shared vision of renewal and revitalization.¹⁸ By articulating a compelling vision grounded in the values and mission of the Bethel Church community, leaders can galvanize collective action and foster a sense of purpose and direction among congregants. Moreover, transformative leaders prioritize the empowerment of individuals, encouraging active participation and ownership in the renewal process.¹⁹

Furthermore, transformative leadership theory underscores the importance of fostering innovation within organizations as a means of adapting to changing circumstances and addressing emerging challenges.²⁰ In the context of church renewal,

¹⁶ Northouse, *Leadership*, 246-401.

¹⁷ Bass, "Two Decades of Research and Development," 9-32.

¹⁸ Yukl, "Leadership," 1-42.

¹⁹ Bass, "Two Decades of Research and Development," 9-32.

²⁰ Northouse, *Leadership*, 246-401.

this translates into creating opportunities for experimentation, embracing new ideas, and challenging conventional practices that may impede progress. By cultivating a culture of innovation and creativity, church leaders can position the Bethel Church community for sustained growth and vitality.²¹

Additionally, transformative leadership theory highlights the significance of fostering a culture of continuous improvement within organizations characterized by openness to feedback, reflection, and adaptation.²² In the context of church renewal, this involves creating spaces for dialogue, reflection, and discernment, where congregants can collectively discern God's leading and respond to the evolving needs of their community. By prioritizing a culture of learning and growth, church leaders can foster resilience and adaptability within the Bethel Church community, enabling it to thrive amidst uncertainty and change.²³

Overall, transformative leadership theory provides a comprehensive framework for addressing the project problem of church renewal within the Bethel Church community. By emphasizing the importance of visionary leadership, empowerment, innovation, and continuous improvement, this theory offers actionable insights and strategies for fostering renewal and revitalization in ecclesiastical settings. Grounded in principles of empowerment and collaboration, transformative leadership serves as a guiding light for church leaders seeking to navigate the complexities of organizational change and lead their congregations toward a future filled with hope and possibility.

²¹ Yukl, "Leadership," 1-42.

²² Bass, "Two Decades of Research and Development," 9-32.

²³ Northouse, *Leadership*, 246-401.

Engagement with Biblical Foundations

Engagement with biblical foundations through the lens of transformative leadership theory offers a profound opportunity to glean new insights and perspectives on timeless narratives such as the Book of Ezra. Within the biblical narrative, Ezra emerges as a transformative leader tasked with the monumental challenge of leading the Jewish community in the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem following a period of exile. Through an exploration of Ezra's leadership, people can discern echoes of transformative leadership principles that resonate with contemporary notions of visionary leadership, organizational renewal, and adaptive leadership.²⁴

One of the central tenets of transformative leadership theory is the notion of vision casting, wherein leaders articulate a compelling vision that inspires and mobilizes their followers toward a shared goal.²⁵ In the case of Ezra, there is a clear demonstration of visionary leadership as he leads the Jewish community in the restoration of the temple, symbolizing the renewal of their spiritual identity and covenant with God. Ezra's unwavering commitment to the vision of rebuilding the temple serves as a rallying point for the community, galvanizing collective action and fostering a sense of purpose and direction amidst adversity.²⁶

Moreover, transformative leadership theory emphasizes the importance of organizational renewal, whereby leaders initiate transformative changes within their organizations to adapt to changing circumstances and achieve desired outcomes.²⁷ In the

²⁴ Northouse, *Leadership*, 246-401.

²⁵ Yukl, "Leadership," 1-42.

²⁶ Bass, "Two Decades of Research and Development," 9-32.

²⁷ Bass, "Two Decades of Research and Development," 9-32.

context of Ezra's leadership, there is a profound process of organizational renewal as the Jewish community undergoes a spiritual and cultural revitalization through the reconstruction of the temple. Ezra's leadership is characterized by a commitment to restoring religious practices, adherence to the Bible, and the rebuilding of the temple as a symbol of renewed spiritual vitality and identity.²⁸

Additionally, transformative leadership theory highlights the significance of adaptive leadership, wherein leaders navigate challenges and uncertainty by adapting their strategies and approaches to effectively address emerging issues.²⁹ In the biblical narrative, Ezra exemplifies adaptive leadership as he confronts various obstacles and oppositions during the rebuilding process, including political opposition and internal conflicts. Ezra's ability to navigate these challenges with resilience and perseverance underscores his adaptive leadership style, which enables the Jewish community to overcome adversity and achieve their collective goals.

Applying transformative leadership insights to biblical narratives such as the Book of Ezra deepens understanding of leadership dynamics within religious contexts and extracts timeless principles for guiding contemporary church renewal efforts. Examining Ezra's visionary leadership, organizational renewal efforts, and adaptive leadership strategies, people glean valuable insights and lessons that resonate with the challenges and opportunities facing modern-day church leaders. Ultimately, this

²⁸ Bass, "Two Decades of Research and Development," 9-32.

²⁹ Bernard M. Bass and Ronald E. Riggio, *Transformational Leadership* (London, UK: Psychology Press, 2006), 115-321.

interdisciplinary exploration enriches appreciation for the transformative power of leadership within the context of spiritual renewal and revitalization.

Engagement with Theological Foundations

Engagement with theological foundations through the lens of transformative leadership theory provides a deep understanding of the role of leaders as agents of change and transformation within the church. At the intersection of leadership, theology, and church renewal lies the profound legacy of figures such as John Wesley, whose life and work offer valuable insights into the theological imperatives driving church renewal efforts.³⁰ Wesley's theological framework, characterized by an emphasis on personal and social holiness, aligns closely with the principles of transformative leadership, which prioritize the holistic transformation of individuals and communities.³¹

John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, is a towering figure in Christian history known for his profound theological insights and transformative leadership within the church. Born in 1703 in Epworth, England, Wesley was raised in a devout Anglican family and later went on to study at Oxford University, where he became a fellow of Lincoln College and was ordained as a priest in the Church of England.³² Wesley's theological journey was marked by a deep spiritual awakening and a commitment to pursue personal holiness and social justice. Influenced by the Moravian Pietists and his own experiences of faith, Wesley came to understand salvation not merely as a doctrinal

³⁰ Tyerman, *The Life and Times of the Rev. John Wesley*, 126-138.

³¹ Bernard and Riggio, *Transformational Leadership*, 115-321.

³² Tyerman, *The Life and Times of the Rev. John Wesley*, 126-138.

concept but as a transformative experience of God's grace leading to holiness of heart and life.³³

Central to Wesley's theological framework was the concept of "Christian perfection," or the belief in the possibility of attaining perfect love for God and neighbor in this life. This emphasis on holiness and sanctification reflected Wesley's conviction that the Christian life was a journey of continual growth and transformation in grace.³⁴ Moreover, Wesley's theology was deeply rooted in the Wesleyan Quadrilateral, which posited that theological understanding should be informed by scripture, tradition, reason, and experience. This holistic approach to theology allowed Wesley to engage with diverse theological perspectives and draw insights from various sources while remaining grounded in the authority of scripture.³⁵

In addition to his theological contributions, Wesley's leadership within the Methodist movement exemplified transformative leadership principles. Wesley's leadership style was characterized by his tireless itinerant preaching, organizational innovations, and emphasis on lay leadership and accountability structures.³⁶ Wesley's emphasis on field preaching and small group meetings provided opportunities for personal transformation and discipleship, allowing individuals to experience God's grace in community and grow in their faith.³⁷ Moreover, Wesley's commitment to social justice led him to advocate for prison reform, education for the poor, and the abolition of slavery,

³³ Tyerman, *The Life and Times of the Rev. John Wesley*, 126-138.

³⁴ Tyerman, *The Life and Times of the Rev. John Wesley*, 126-138.

³⁵ Tyerman, *The Life and Times of the Rev. John Wesley*, 126-138.

³⁶ Shields and Hesbol, "Transformative Leadership Approaches," 3-22.

³⁷ Shields and Hesbol, "Transformative Leadership Approaches," 3-22.

reflecting his belief in the transformative power of the gospel to bring about societal change.³⁸

John Wesley's theological insights and transformative leadership have left an indelible mark on the Christian church. His emphasis on personal and social holiness, coupled with his innovative approaches to ministry and organizational leadership, inspires and challenges Christians to pursue lives of faith, love, and service. As the church grapples with the challenges of the twenty-first century, Wesley's legacy serves as a beacon of hope and a reminder of the transformative power of God's grace at work in the world.

Central to transformative leadership theory is the notion of leaders as visionaries who articulate a compelling vision that inspires and mobilizes their followers toward a shared goal.³⁹ Within theological discourse, this aligns with the concept of prophetic leadership, wherein leaders are called to discern and articulate God's vision for His people.⁴⁰ Drawing from Wesleyan theology, there exist parallels with this notion of prophetic leadership in Wesley's emphasis on the pursuit of holiness and the transformation of society through acts of mercy and justice.⁴¹ By synthesizing transformative leadership theory with Wesleyan theology, there is a deeper appreciation for the theological imperatives driving church renewal efforts, rooted in a vision of personal and social transformation grounded in the love of God and neighbor.

³⁸ Tyerman, *The Life and Times of the Rev. John Wesley*, 126-138.

³⁹ Northouse, *Leadership*, 246-401.

⁴⁰ Philip Podsakoff, "Transformational Leader Behaviors and their Effects on Followers' Trust in Leader, Satisfaction, and Organizational Citizenship Behaviors," *The Leadership Quarterly* 1, no. 2 (1990): 107-142.

⁴¹ Tyerman, *The Life and Times of the Rev. John Wesley*, 126-138.

Furthermore, transformative leadership theory emphasizes the importance of empowering individuals and fostering a culture of collaboration and participation within organizations.⁴² In theological terms, this resonates with the concept of the priesthood of all believers, which asserts the equal value and responsibility of all members of the church in participating in God's mission.⁴³ Wesleyan theology, with its emphasis on lay leadership and congregational participation, aligns closely with this notion of empowering individuals to contribute to the renewal and revitalization of the church.⁴⁴

Moreover, transformative leadership theory underscores the significance of organizational renewal, whereby leaders initiate transformative changes within their organizations to adapt to changing circumstances and achieve desired outcomes.⁴⁵ Within theological discourse, this reflects the concept of ecclesial renewal, wherein the church continually discerns and responds to the movement of the Holy Spirit to remain faithful and effective in its mission.⁴⁶ Wesleyan theology, with its emphasis on spiritual disciplines, accountability structures, and small group ministries, provides practical frameworks for fostering organizational renewal within the church.⁴⁷

By synthesizing transformative leadership theory with theological principles, we develop a more holistic understanding of the theological imperatives driving church renewal efforts. Exploring Wesleyan theology and its alignment with transformative

⁴² Bernard and Riggio, *Transformational Leadership*, 115-321.

⁴³ Bernard and Riggio, *Transformational Leadership*, 115-321.

⁴⁴ Tyerman, *The Life and Times of the Rev. John Wesley*, 126-138.

⁴⁵ Northouse, *Leadership*, 246-401.

⁴⁶ Podsakoff et al, "Transformational Leader Behaviors," 107-142.

⁴⁷ Tyerman, *The Life and Times of the Rev. John Wesley*, 126-138.

leadership principles gives people valuable insights into the role of leaders as agents of change and transformation within the church. Ultimately, this interdisciplinary approach enriches appreciation for the dynamic interplay between leadership, theology, and church renewal, offering a framework for fostering holistic transformation within ecclesiastical communities.

Historical Foundations

Engagement with historical foundations through the lens of transformative leadership theory provides invaluable insights into the dynamics of organizational change within religious institutions. By examining historical examples such as the Protestant Reformation and the revitalization efforts of figures like Martin Luther and John Wesley, people can discern patterns, challenges, and strategies that resonate with contemporary church renewal initiatives.⁴⁸ Martin Luther, a seminal figure of the Protestant Reformation, profoundly reshaped the landscape of Christianity in the sixteenth century through his theological insights and transformative leadership. Born in Eisleben, Germany, in 1483, Luther's upbringing in a devout Catholic household laid the foundation for his later theological convictions and reform efforts.⁴⁹

Luther's theological journey reached a pivotal moment when, as a young monk and professor of theology at the University of Wittenberg, he became increasingly troubled by the corruption and abuses within the Catholic Church, particularly the sale of

⁴⁸ Podsakoff, et al., "Transformational Leader Behaviors," 107-142.

⁴⁹ Robert Kolb, "Martin Luther," *Christian Theologies of the Sacraments: A Comparative Introduction* (2020): 132-151.

indulgences. In 1517, Luther famously penned his Ninety-five Theses, challenging the practice of indulgences and calling for theological debate and reform within the church.⁵⁰

This act of defiance against ecclesiastical authority catalyzed a movement for religious and social change that became known as the Protestant Reformation. Luther's writings, including his translation of the Bible into German and his treatises on theology and faith, sparked widespread debate and controversy, leading to a rupture within Western Christianity.⁵¹

At the heart of Luther's theological teachings was the concept of *sola scriptura*, or the belief in the authority of scripture as the sole source of divine revelation and truth. Luther emphasized the importance of individual faith and direct access to God through scripture, challenging the hierarchical structures of the Catholic Church and advocating for a more personal and direct relationship with God.⁵²

Moreover, Luther's leadership during the Protestant Reformation exemplified transformative leadership principles. He demonstrated courage, conviction, and resilience in the face of opposition from ecclesiastical authorities and political leaders. Luther's willingness to challenge established norms and traditions, coupled with his commitment to reforming the church according to biblical principles, inspired a generation of followers and laid the groundwork for the emergence of Protestantism. Luther's impact extended beyond theological debates to encompass broader social and political transformations. His teachings on the priesthood of all believers and the dignity of the

⁵⁰ Kolb, "Martin Luther," 132-151.

⁵¹ Kolb, "Martin Luther," 132-151.

⁵² Kolb, "Martin Luther," 132-151.

individual contributed to the rise of democratic principles and the empowerment of ordinary people within society.⁵³

Martin Luther's life and work epitomize the transformative power of visionary leadership and theological conviction in driving forward movements of religious and social change. His courage, integrity, and commitment to reforming the church according to biblical principles continue to inspire Christians around the world to pursue lives of faith, justice, and service. As the church grapples with contemporary challenges, Luther's legacy serves as a reminder of the enduring relevance of transformative leadership in shaping the course of history and advancing the cause of God's kingdom.

The Protestant Reformation, initiated by Martin Luther in the sixteenth century, serves as a seminal example of transformative leadership in religious history. Luther's bold stand against the perceived corruption and abuses of the Catholic Church sparked a wave of religious and social change, leading to the emergence of Protestantism and the restructuring of religious institutions across Europe.⁵⁴ Central to Luther's leadership was his unwavering commitment to reforming the church according to biblical principles and his ability to inspire and mobilize followers around a shared vision of religious renewal.⁵⁵ Drawing parallels with transformative leadership theory, Luther exhibited characteristics such as vision casting, empowerment of individuals, and organizational renewal, which were instrumental in driving forward the Protestant Reformation.⁵⁶ Luther's emphasis on

⁵³ Kolb, "Martin Luther," 132-151.

⁵⁴ Bruce Avolio and Francis Yammarino, eds., *Transformational and Charismatic Leadership: The Road Ahead* (Leeds, UK: Emerald Group Publishing, 2013), 167-342.

⁵⁵ Avolio and Yammarino, *Transformational and Charismatic Leadership*, 167-342.

⁵⁶ Northouse, *Leadership*, 246-401.

the priesthood of all believers and the authority of scripture resonates with the transformative leadership principle of empowering individuals and fostering a culture of collaboration within organizations.⁵⁷

Similarly, John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, played a pivotal role in revitalizing religious life in eighteenth-century England through his transformative leadership approach.⁵⁸ Wesley's leadership was characterized by his tireless preaching, emphasis on personal and social holiness, and innovative methods of organizing and disciplining his followers.⁵⁹ By synthesizing transformative leadership theory with Wesley's historical context, people gain insights into the strategies and approaches employed by Wesley to bring about religious renewal within the Methodist movement.

Moreover, the historical precedents set by Luther and Wesley underscore the challenges and opportunities inherent in leading organizational change within religious institutions.⁶⁰ Both leaders faced opposition and resistance from established authorities and faced internal conflicts within their respective movements. However, their steadfast commitment to their vision, coupled with their ability to adapt and innovate, ultimately led to the transformation of religious landscapes and the revitalization of ecclesiastical communities.⁶¹

By analyzing historical examples through the lens of transformative leadership theory, people gain a deeper understanding of the complexities of organizational change

⁵⁷ Bass, "Two Decades of Research and Development," 9-32.

⁵⁸ Avolio and Yammarino, *Transformational and Charismatic Leadership*, 167-342.

⁵⁹ Yukl, "Leadership," 1-42.

⁶⁰ Avolio and Yammarino, *Transformational and Charismatic Leadership*, 167-342.

⁶¹ Yukl, "Leadership," 1-42.

within religious institutions. Through a synthesis of historical insights and contemporary leadership principles, it becomes possible to discern strategies and approaches that resonate with contemporary church renewal initiatives. Ultimately, this interdisciplinary exploration enriches the appreciation for the dynamic interplay between leadership, history, and religious renewal, offering valuable lessons for navigating the challenges and opportunities facing modern-day ecclesiastical communities.

Conclusion

The interdisciplinary exploration of transformative leadership theory provides a robust framework for addressing the project problem of church renewal within the Bethel Church community. By engaging with biblical, theological, and historical foundations, I have gleaned valuable insights into the dynamics of organizational change and leadership within ecclesiastical contexts. By synthesizing transformative leadership principles with biblical narratives such as the Book of Ezra, I have uncovered parallels between visionary leadership, organizational renewal, and adaptive leadership strategies employed by biblical figures and contemporary church leaders.

Furthermore, the examination of theological foundations, particularly through the lens of figures like John Wesley, has enriched my understanding of the theological imperatives driving church renewal efforts. Wesley's emphasis on personal and social holiness, coupled with his innovative leadership approaches, serves as a beacon for contemporary church leaders seeking to revitalize their congregations. By integrating transformative leadership theory with Wesleyan theology, I have identified practical

frameworks for fostering empowerment, collaboration, and spiritual renewal within ecclesiastical communities.

Additionally, historical precedents, including the Protestant Reformation and the Methodist revival, have been analyzed to provide valuable lessons and strategies for navigating the challenges of organizational change within religious institutions. Leaders such as Martin Luther and John Wesley exemplify the transformative power of visionary leadership, resilience, and adaptability in driving forward movements of religious renewal and revitalization. Their experiences serve as a source of inspiration and guidance for contemporary church leaders embarking on church renewal initiatives.

Moving forward, the insights gleaned from our interdisciplinary exploration can inform strategic interventions and initiatives aimed at fostering renewal, vitality, and relevance within the Bethel Church community. By leveraging transformative leadership principles, church leaders can articulate compelling visions, empower individuals, and foster a culture of innovation and continuous improvement. Moreover, by grounding their efforts in biblical, theological, and historical foundations, they can ensure that their initiatives are aligned with the timeless values and principles of the Christian faith.

In essence, the interdisciplinary exploration of transformative leadership theory offers a holistic and integrated approach to addressing the complex challenges facing ecclesiastical communities in their pursuit of renewal. By drawing from diverse disciplines and perspectives, we can navigate the complexities of organizational change with wisdom, discernment, and faithfulness to the shared mission. As people embark on this journey of church renewal, they need to be guided by the transformative power of

visionary leadership, grounded in the timeless truths of scripture and the rich heritage of the theological tradition.

CHAPTER SIX

PROJECT ANALYSIS

This final chapter integrates the lessons learned from the foundation chapters and project implementation, which served as the foundation for this project. The ministry focus chapter concluded that a robust leadership framework rooted in biblical, historical, and theological principles is essential for church renewal. Specifically, themes from the Protestant Reformation, such as the priesthood of all believers and John Wesley's emphasis on personal and social holiness, underscored the need for spiritual and practical transformation in ministry. The integration research demonstrated that combining these historical and theological insights with contemporary leadership theories, such as transformational leadership, creates a framework that equips leaders to meet the evolving needs of congregations. This project synthesizes these findings and applies them to the specific context of Bethel Independent Free Methodist Church, where a leadership vacuum has hindered its growth and sustainability. By combining my journey of transformation with these academic insights, this project reflects the culmination of my Doctor of Ministry studies. It demonstrates the potential for leadership training to create lasting change in a church community.

This final chapter of my project analysis encapsulates the journey of transformation and integration that has been central to my work throughout my Doctor of Ministry (DMin) program. The "Equipping Ministry Leaders for the Evolving Needs of

the Congregation” project represents a significant synthesis of personal, theological, and practical insights gained throughout my studies. It draws deeply from my spiritual transformation, my explored theological foundations, and the leadership principles necessary for church renewal. This project is not merely an academic exercise, but a reflection of the broader spiritual and practical challenges faced by Bethel Independent Free Methodist Church, a congregation that needs revitalization.

My personal story of transformation serves as the foundation for this project. For much of my early life, I was taught what not to do and subjected to correction and criticism without the benefit of encouragement or guidance. This environment instilled a rigid view of faith that lacked the grace and love that Christ embodies. My relationship with God was initially shaped by fear and obligation rather than a true understanding of Christ’s redeeming love. Over time, however, through intentional spiritual development and training, I experienced a profound personal change. The process of replacing old beliefs with new, Christ-centered ones became the cornerstone of my faith journey. This transformation is reflected in my favorite scripture, 2 Corinthians 5:17: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here.”

The theme of transformation is not only personal but also extends to the context of Bethel Church. Once a thriving congregation, Bethel has experienced a significant decline in recent years. Located in a small, predominantly African American community in rural Florida, the church faces numerous challenges that threaten its future. The project is designed to address the lack of leadership development that has contributed to this decline, aiming to equip ministry leaders with the skills and insights necessary to meet the evolving needs of the congregation. By focusing on leadership training, the project

seeks to reverse the downward trajectory of the church and foster a renewed sense of purpose and vitality.

At the heart of the project is a seven-week leadership training program designed to empower Bethel's ministry leaders. This program includes four core training modules that cover key leadership topics relevant to the church's current challenges. Through pre- and post-surveys, interviews, and reflection journals, the project gathers data to assess the effectiveness of the training and to ensure that the leadership development is aligned with the congregation's specific needs. The ultimate goal is to equip leaders not only with practical skills but also with a renewed spiritual foundation that will guide them in their ministry.

The biblical foundation of the project draws from Ezra 5:11, which speaks of the rebuilding of the temple in the face of opposition. The story of Ezra and the Israelites returning from exile provides a powerful parallel to Bethel's current situation. Just as Ezra led the Israelites in rebuilding their community and renewing their covenant with God, Bethel's leaders are called to a similar task of spiritual and organizational renewal. This scriptural foundation emphasizes the importance of faithfulness, perseverance, and visionary leadership in difficult times, offering theological and practical guidance for Bethel's renewal efforts.

The historical foundation of the project draws upon the lessons of the Protestant Reformation, particularly the emphasis on the priesthood of all believers and the transformative power of scripture. The Reformation serves as a valuable historical precedent for church renewal, offering insights into how communities of faith can adapt to changing circumstances while remaining rooted in biblical truth. By empowering

individuals to engage with scripture and fostering a sense of shared leadership, the project seeks to create a collaborative and inclusive approach to leadership at Bethel Church.

John Wesley's theological contributions also play a significant role in shaping the project's approach. Wesley's emphasis on personal and social holiness aligns with the broader goal of equipping Bethel's leaders for spiritual and practical renewal. Wesley's innovative leadership practices, including the use of small group meetings and an emphasis on spiritual disciplines, offer practical insights that have been integrated into the leadership training program. The project aims to foster a culture of collaboration and spiritual growth within the church by incorporating Wesleyan principles of personal transformation and communal accountability.

In addition to biblical, historical, and theological foundations, the project incorporates interdisciplinary insights from contemporary leadership theory, particularly the concept of transformative leadership. Transformative leadership focuses on inspiring positive change within individuals and organizations by fostering collaboration, empowerment, and spiritual renewal. This leadership approach is particularly relevant to Bethel's situation, as it encourages leaders to work with the congregation to address the church's evolving needs. The emphasis on inclusivity and shared purpose is central to the project's strategy for revitalizing the church community.

The integration of these diverse foundations—biblical, historical, theological, and interdisciplinary—provides a comprehensive framework for addressing Bethel Church's challenges. Drawing upon spiritual and practical insights, the project offers a holistic approach to leadership development grounded in scripture and informed by historical and

contemporary leadership practices. This integrated approach ensures that Bethel's leaders are equipped with practical tools but spiritually grounded in their ministry.

Ultimately, this project represents the culmination of my work throughout the doctoral program. It has been shaped by my journey of transformation, the theological and historical foundations explored in my studies, and the practical challenges of leadership within a church context. The project aims to equip Bethel's ministry leaders with the tools they need to lead the congregation through a renewal, ensuring that the church can thrive in the years to come. As I conclude this chapter, I reflect on how this work has been a journey of personal and communal transformation, rooted in the enduring truths of scripture and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

While the personal transformation that I have undergone serves as a critical foundation for this project, the broader focus is on how such transformation can be multiplied within a community. The leaders at Bethel Church must first experience personal renewal before effectively leading others through the congregation's challenges. This transformation requires a shift not only in mindset but also in leadership practices as leaders embrace new approaches to ministry that are both spiritually and practically sound. Just as I had to move from a life marked by criticism and correction to one grounded in Christ's love and redemption, Bethel's leaders must undergo their process of spiritual renewal. This will enable them to minister from a place of grace and empowerment rather than merely maintaining old traditions that no longer serve the church's current needs.

Incorporating the lessons from my transformation, the leadership development program in this project focuses on fostering an environment of encouragement and

growth. One of the key components of the training modules is teaching leaders how to mentor and uplift their congregants rather than relying on outdated methods of control or correction. This approach is particularly relevant in the context of Bethel Church, where the congregation has become disillusioned and disconnected. The program emphasizes the importance of relational leadership, where leaders are called to walk alongside their congregants, helping them grow in faith and service. This relational leadership model is grounded in Christ's teachings, who modeled a ministry of presence, compassion, and empowerment.

Furthermore, this project acknowledges the importance of creating a sustainable framework for leadership at Bethel Church. The challenges faced by Bethel are not unique to this congregation alone; many churches struggle with declining attendance, aging membership, and a lack of engagement from younger generations. This project addresses these issues by preparing leaders to adapt to the evolving needs of their congregation and community. By equipping leaders with spiritual and practical tools, the training program ensures that Bethel Church will not only survive but thrive in the coming years. The long-term vision of this project is to create a leadership model that can be sustained and reproduced, ensuring that future generations of leaders are well-prepared to face the challenges that lie ahead.

In conclusion, the work presented in this project represents more than just a solution to the current challenges faced by Bethel Church; it is a blueprint for ongoing transformation and renewal. Rooted in the lessons of my personal faith journey and informed by biblical, historical, and theological insights, this project seeks to foster a new era of leadership at Bethel Church. By equipping ministry leaders with the skills and

spiritual foundation they need, this project lays the groundwork for sustained renewal and growth. Ultimately, the goal is to create a thriving, vibrant church community empowered to face the challenges of the future with faith, resilience, and hope. Through this final project, I hope to contribute to the ongoing work of church renewal within Bethel Church and in the broader context of Christian ministry.

Methodology

The methodology for this project was centered on a qualitative research approach, with the primary aim of gathering and analyzing data related to the leadership development of ten current ministry leaders at Bethel Church. These leaders were selected based on their involvement in ministry and the church's recent decline in growth and participation. The project aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of a seven-week training program designed to equip these leaders with the skills and strategies necessary to reverse this decline and foster church renewal. The data collection methods included pre- and post-surveys, interviews, and participant observations, providing a comprehensive view of the impact of the training and the leaders' readiness to address the congregation's evolving challenges.

A qualitative research approach was chosen because it was well-suited to explore the ministry leaders' behaviors, attitudes, and experiences. Qualitative research allows a deeper understanding of the participant's perceptions of their leadership abilities and the training program's influence on their practices. Through open-ended interviews and detailed surveys, this research aimed to capture the complexity of leadership challenges at Bethel Church and evaluate the potential for change through focused training.

The choice of qualitative research was intentional, as it aligns with church leadership's relational and spiritual dynamics. Bethel Church, with its predominantly African American congregation in a rural setting, required an approach that captured the nuanced experiences of its leaders. By focusing on open-ended interviews, surveys, and participant observations, this methodology provided a comprehensive view of not only the technical skills of the leaders but also their spiritual and emotional growth. This method allowed for triangulation of data, ensuring reliability and depth. Pre- and post-surveys measured shifts in leadership confidence and adaptability, while interviews provided insight into participants' personal experiences with the training. Observations during the sessions revealed how participants engaged with the material, offering immediate feedback on the program's effectiveness.

The project employed multiple data collection methods to ensure a robust evaluation of the training program's effectiveness. Pre- and post-surveys were key tools in measuring changes in the participants' self-perception and leadership confidence. These surveys utilized a Likert scale, enabling participants to rate their agreement or disagreement with various statements about their readiness for leadership, adaptability, and engagement with the congregation. The surveys were designed to assess participants' initial leadership mindset and tracked how these attitudes shifted after completing the training.

Pre- and post-interviews were conducted alongside the surveys to provide a more nuanced view of the participants' leadership experiences. The pre-interview questions explored the participants' self-awareness regarding their leadership skills and understanding of leadership traits. The post-interviews focused on evaluating the

participants' receptiveness to new strategies introduced during the training and their plans for applying these strategies. This qualitative data was crucial in assessing the program's overall impact and determining its potential for ongoing application in the church's leadership structure.

The need for a comprehensive assessment led to the decision to combine pre- and post-surveys, interviews, and participant observations. This mixed-methods approach allowed for the triangulation of data, ensuring that the findings were reliable and holistic. The surveys provided quantifiable data showing measurable changes in attitudes, while the interviews offered deeper insights into the participants' personal experiences. Observations during the training sessions further enriched the study by capturing real-time behaviors and reactions to the content presented.

This approach was especially appropriate for Bethel Church's unique context. The qualitative nature of the research focused on the personal and spiritual dimensions of leadership, which were central to the ministry setting. By engaging participants in reflective activities and in-depth discussions, the research encouraged leaders to critically examine their practices and consider how they could be improved. This method measured the training program's effectiveness and inspired lasting change in leadership practices.

The seven-week leadership training program was carefully structured, with each week dedicated to a specific leadership theme. The first week focused on administering pre-surveys and initiating group discussions, which established a baseline understanding of participants' leadership skills. This initial session set the foundation for the rest of the program and encouraged participants to reflect on their leadership roles and aspirations.

In the second week, the training introduced transformational leadership, exploring how this style could be applied within the church context. Participants engaged in a thirty-minute lesson followed by group discussions, where they compared transformational leadership with other leadership styles they had encountered. The week concluded with personal reflection exercises through journaling, helping participants internalize the concepts discussed.

The third week examined leadership in the postmodern church, specifically addressing the challenges faced by contemporary churches, including those exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Group discussions encouraged participants to share their experiences and brainstorm solutions for adapting leadership practices to meet evolving congregational needs. Journaling activities helped solidify these insights.

In Week Four, the focus shifted to practical aspects of church operations and administration, particularly the role of technology in improving church efficiency. Participants discussed how these principles could be implemented in their context. Week Five centered on servant leadership, drawing from biblical models such as Jesus' example of leadership and theologian John Wesley's ministry. This session emphasized the importance of humility and service in leadership roles.

Week Six provided participants an opportunity to reflect on the entire program through group discussions and one-on-one interviews. These interviews gathered personal insights into the participants' learning experiences and plans for implementing new leadership strategies. The group discussions further promoted peer learning and allowed leaders to share their reflections.

The final week, Week Seven, focused on collecting participants' journals, administering post-surveys, and discussing the next steps for future leadership development. This closing session was designed to consolidate the learning from the entire program and encourage participants to continue their leadership growth beyond the training. The data collected in this final week was crucial for evaluating the project's success.

After the program was completed, the data from the pre- and post-surveys, interviews, and observations were analyzed to identify key themes and trends. The pre-surveys and interviews were compared with the post-surveys and interviews to measure the effectiveness of the training program. The analysis focused on changes in the participants' confidence as leaders, their willingness to adapt their leadership style, and their level of engagement with the congregation.

Observations from the training sessions were also analyzed to evaluate how participants interacted with the material and applied the lessons to their leadership contexts. This observational data provided valuable insights into how participants processed and responded to the information presented. The combination of survey data, interview feedback, and observational notes allowed for a comprehensive evaluation of the program's impact on the leaders' growth.

Once the data analysis was complete, a detailed report summarizing the key findings and trends identified during the study was prepared. This report was presented to Bethel Church's ministry leaders, offering insights into the program's strengths and areas for improvement. The findings indicated that the training program positively impacted the participants, particularly in leadership confidence, adaptability, and spiritual growth.

The report also included recommendations for future leadership development initiatives at Bethel Church. Suggestions included offering ongoing training opportunities and incorporating feedback from participants into future programs. These recommendations aimed to build on the progress made during the seven-week training and ensure sustained growth for the leaders and the church.

In conclusion, the methodology for this project employed a qualitative research approach, which successfully captured the participants' experiences and evaluated the impact of a leadership training program at Bethel Church. The combination of surveys, interviews, and observations comprehensively assessed the leaders' development. The project fostered practical skill development and spiritual growth by structuring the program around key leadership themes and encouraging personal reflection. Through this methodology, the project demonstrated that targeted leadership training can play a critical role in church renewal and provide leaders with the tools needed to address the evolving needs of their congregation.

The methodology employed in this project allowed for a comprehensive analysis of the participants' leadership development and addressed the deeper, underlying challenges Bethel Church faced. The project aimed to assess technical leadership skills and the spiritual, emotional, and relational dimensions of ministry leadership by focusing on qualitative research methods. The qualitative nature of the study helped capture the leaders' lived experiences, offering a more holistic understanding of their leadership journeys and how they engaged with the congregation and its evolving needs.

The inclusion of both pre- and post-training assessments was critical for evaluating the progression of leadership development throughout the seven-week

program. The pre-surveys and pre-interviews provided a baseline for understanding the participants' initial perceptions of their leadership abilities, readiness to adapt to new challenges, and openness to learning. These initial data points gave insight into the prevailing attitudes and beliefs about leadership within the church's context. The responses highlighted a general need for improved confidence and clarity in leadership roles, which validated the need for the training program.

As the training progressed, participant observations became an essential part of the methodology. Observing how participants engaged with the training material, interacted with one another, and applied the lessons provided valuable real-time feedback on the effectiveness of the sessions. For instance, during discussions on transformational leadership in Week Two, participants demonstrated increased enthusiasm for applying new strategies to their ministry areas. These observations helped identify not only the immediate impact of the lessons but also the areas where additional support or clarification was necessary.

The post-surveys and post-interviews conducted at the end of the program were instrumental in assessing how much the training had influenced the participants. By comparing their responses to the pre-assessments, it was possible to measure shifts in their leadership confidence, adaptability, and commitment to the church's mission. The post-survey results indicated that most participants felt more equipped to lead the congregation through renewal efforts. For example, questions about the participants' readiness to lead in diverse and changing church environments showed marked improvement, demonstrating that the training had a positive effect on their perceptions of their leadership capabilities.

One of the most significant findings from the post-interviews was the participants' willingness to continue seeking leadership development beyond the program. Many expressed a desire for ongoing training and mentorship to further enhance their leadership skills. This feedback reinforced the importance of continuous education and spiritual growth in effective leadership. It also suggested that while the seven-week program was beneficial, the participants recognized the need for long-term development to sustain the church's growth and renewal.

The decision to utilize qualitative methods was practical and deeply aligned with the project's theological and spiritual goals. Leadership within a church context often involves more than managing tasks or organizing events—it requires inspiring, mentoring, and spiritually guiding others. Qualitative research methods, such as interviews and observations, allowed for a deeper exploration of these relational and spiritual aspects of leadership. By using open-ended questions in the interviews, the research gathered rich, narrative data that reflected the complexity of leadership within Bethel Church's context.

Additionally, the qualitative approach helped reveal the participants' emotional and spiritual growth, which would have been difficult to capture using purely quantitative methods. Leadership development in a church setting is closely tied to personal faith journeys, and qualitative data allowed for a more nuanced understanding of how the training impacted the participants on a personal and spiritual level. The ability to listen to the participants' reflections and observe their interactions provided a more comprehensive view of the training's effectiveness.

The methodology was designed specifically to address the unique challenges faced by Bethel Church, a small, predominantly African American congregation in a rural setting. One of the church's key issues was the disconnect between its leadership and the congregation's evolving needs. The qualitative methods used in this study allowed me to engage directly with these issues, focusing on how leadership development could bridge the gap between the congregation's expectations and long-term goals.

By incorporating biblical lessons on leadership and practical strategies for church administration, the training program directly addressed the gaps in leadership at Bethel Church. For example, the lesson on servant leadership, modeled after the teachings of John Wesley, resonated deeply with the participants, many of whom reflected in their journals that this approach aligned with their desire to lead through humility and service. These reflections, combined with the post-survey data, showed that the training had equipped the leaders with practical skills and fostered a renewed commitment to serving their congregation in meaningful ways.

Throughout the training program, spiritual reflection played a crucial role in the participants' development. The inclusion of journaling after each session allowed leaders to process the lessons on a deeper, spiritual level. These journals served as both a personal reflection tool and a data source for the project, offering insights into how the participants internalized the teachings and applied them to their leadership roles. For instance, many leaders noted that the lesson on postmodern leadership helped them rethink how they engaged with younger generations, a group that had become increasingly disconnected from the church.

Spiritual reflection through journaling also helped reinforce the theological foundations of the project. By encouraging participants to reflect on their faith journeys, the training promoted a leadership style deeply rooted in spiritual growth and personal transformation. This focus on spiritual reflection ensured that the leadership development was not purely strategic or administrative but also holistic, integrating practical skills and spiritual wisdom.

The implementation of the training program highlighted both successes and challenges. For instance, during Week Two's transformational leadership session, several participants initially hesitated about changing their established leadership styles. However, group discussions revealed a growing enthusiasm for adopting these methods as participants began to see the potential for building stronger connections with the congregation.

Deviations from the original plan included extending discussion times during Weeks Three and Four to accommodate participants' need for deeper engagement with topics like postmodern church dynamics and the use of technology in ministry. These adjustments ensured that the program remained responsive to participants' needs. Additionally, logistical challenges, such as scheduling conflicts, required flexibility in session timing, which was communicated through weekly check-ins with participants.

One key objective of this project was to create a sustainable leadership development model that could be continued beyond the seven-week program. The qualitative data collected from the post-surveys and interviews indicated that the participants felt a strong sense of ownership over their leadership growth and expressed a desire for continued learning opportunities. Many participants mentioned that the training

had inspired them to seek additional resources, such as books, workshops, and mentorship programs, to further their development.

The project's success in fostering a mindset of continuous growth suggests that the methodology addressed Bethel Church's immediate challenges and laid the groundwork for long-term leadership development. By equipping leaders with the necessary tools and the mindset to continue their learning, the project created a ripple effect that could positively impact the church for years. This approach ensured that the leadership development program would not be a one-time event but an ongoing process of growth and renewal.

In summary, this project's methodology was designed to thoroughly assess the impact of a leadership development program at Bethel Church. By utilizing qualitative methods, such as pre- and post-surveys, interviews, and participant observations, the project captured the complexities of leadership within a church setting. It provided valuable insights into the participants' growth. The structured yet flexible nature of the training allowed for a focus on both practical skills and spiritual reflection, ensuring that the leaders were well-equipped to address the church's evolving needs.

The data collected throughout the project demonstrated significant improvements in the participants' leadership confidence, adaptability, and willingness to engage with the congregation. Moreover, the project fostered a culture of continuous learning and spiritual growth, laying the foundation for long-term leadership development at Bethel Church. This methodology evaluated the immediate outcomes of the training. It contributed to a sustainable model of church renewal, ensuring that Bethel's leaders were equipped to lead their congregation with wisdom, humility, and strength.

Pre- and Post-Surveys

The pre-survey results for the doctoral project, “Equipping Ministry Leaders for the Evolving Needs of the Church,” shed light on how ministry leaders at Bethel IFM Church initially viewed their readiness for leading church renewal efforts. When asked about their preparedness, responses varied: 42.86% strongly agreed that they felt equipped, while 14.29% agreed, with others remaining neutral or expressing disagreement. This range indicates that while some leaders felt confident, others identified areas where they needed additional support to lead renewal initiatives effectively.

Regarding whether their current leadership skills matched the challenges of revitalization, the feedback was similarly mixed. Nearly half (42.86%) strongly agreed that their skills aligned with the church's needs, but 28.57% felt uncertain or disagreed. This disparity highlights a clear opportunity for targeted training that could bridge these skill gaps, enabling leaders to address the specific needs of their congregations effectively and culturally responsive.

Confidence in understanding the diverse needs of their congregation was another area with varied opinions. Only 28.57% of participants felt strongly confident, while others remained neutral or disagreed. This finding underscores the necessity for focused support to help leaders gain a deeper understanding of the unique needs within Bethel IFM Church, which is essential for successful church renewal.

The survey also gauged participants’ commitment to continuous education, revealing that 71.42% agreed or strongly agreed that they actively sought learning opportunities. However, nearly a third of respondents were neutral or disagreed,

suggesting that some leaders might need encouragement to prioritize ongoing development in their leadership journeys. On a positive note, an impressive 92.86% indicated openness to adjusting their leadership styles, showing a willingness to adapt their approaches to serve their church community.

The post-survey results further demonstrate the significant impact of the training program on leadership development and alignment with modern ministry needs. All respondents reported feeling equipped to lead their congregations through processes of renewal and revitalization. This underscores the effectiveness of the training in preparing leaders to tackle the complex challenges and traditional expectations unique to the local church. By focusing intentionally on renewal, participants gained confidence in their ability to guide their congregations through the ongoing journey of transformation, which is crucial for addressing the nuanced challenges in society.

Additionally, the training program strengthened participants' understanding of their congregations' specific needs, including a greater awareness and respect for cultural diversity. With 87.5% of respondents expressing increased openness to adapting their leadership styles, the program clearly fostered flexibility, an essential quality for meeting diverse expectations. This openness to growth reflects a significant shift toward more inclusive, empathetic leadership, where leaders are ready to meet people where they are.

Survey responses also revealed a strong commitment to continuous education and skill enhancement, with 87.5% of participants indicating a motivation to pursue further training. This desire for lifelong learning highlights the importance of staying relevant in an ever-evolving social and cultural landscape. As these leaders continue to develop, they

are likely to contribute positively to their congregations and the broader Christian community.

Moreover, the survey indicated a shared appreciation for constructive feedback, with 87.5% of participants expressing openness to insights from their congregations. This desire for feedback fosters a leadership culture that values collaboration, transparency, and humility. Embracing feedback serves as a powerful tool for personal and professional growth, allowing leaders to refine their approaches and align more closely with their congregation's needs. Leaders who welcome feedback are better positioned to make meaningful adjustments, strengthen relationships, and create vibrant church communities.

The pre- and post-survey results indicated significant growth in participants' leadership confidence and adaptability. For example, on a scale of one to five, participants' average rating of their readiness to lead the church through renewal increased from a rating of 2.8 in the pre-survey to a rating of 4.3 in the post-survey. Similarly, their willingness to adapt leadership styles grew from an average rating of 3.1 to 4.5. Interviews further reinforced these findings. One participant noted, "Before this training, I felt disconnected from the congregation's younger members, but now I have concrete strategies to engage them." Another shared, "The session on servant leadership challenged me to rethink my role not as a manager but as someone who empowers others." While the program achieved many of its goals, some limitations emerged. A few participants expressed a need for more hands-on practice with technological tools discussed in Week Four. These insights suggest areas for future improvement, such as including a dedicated workshop on technology integration.

The program's emphasis on grounding leadership in a spiritual foundation resonated strongly, with every participant affirming that their faith is central to their effectiveness as leaders. This shared conviction underscores how a strong, faith-based foundation empowers leaders to approach church renewal with confidence and compassion. A leader's spiritual grounding serves as a source of strength and a moral compass, guiding them through challenging moments and helping them foster resilience within their congregations. As leaders rely on their faith, they model trust in God, encouraging their congregations to do the same and strengthening the community's collective resilience.

Pre- and Post-Interview

The pre-interview responses reveal varied perspectives on preparedness for leadership roles. Most participants felt equipped due to previous experience or a sense of calling, though one noted feeling unprepared initially but willing to learn. Some emphasized that passion alone is not enough for effective leadership; instead, training, knowledge, and experience are essential. A few participants who had received training expressed a commitment to doing their best in their roles, highlighting a blend of confidence and humility and underscoring that leadership often requires ongoing development.

When asked if they saw themselves as leaders, the majority affirmed their self-identification, though one participant did not. This range of responses reflects differing levels of self-perception and confidence in leadership across personalities and backgrounds. Regarding whether those around them exhibit leadership, responses varied

widely; while some noticed leadership qualities in others, they were not always seen in the right context or role. This diversity suggests that while personal confidence in leadership is generally strong, visible leadership traits or structures may be lacking in their immediate environments.

In response to whether the qualities of an equipped leader are recognizable, nearly all participants agreed, suggesting a shared belief that effective leadership traits are observable and somewhat standardized. While many participants had formal leadership training, some did not, indicating a potential need for more accessible training opportunities. Those who lacked formal training appeared interested in further development, which points to a desire among participants to strengthen leadership capabilities.

The post-interview questions showed that participants felt they had gained new insights from the recent training and planned to apply these strategies to enhance their leadership approach. Additionally, there was optimism about the potential impact of the training on others and the congregation as a whole. This suggests a positive view of ongoing development, with many participants eager to pursue further training to handle the evolving needs of their communities.

In conclusion, the doctoral project has proven to be a powerful catalyst for growth, adaptability, and proactive leadership among the ministry leaders of Bethel IFM Church. Their unanimous confidence in leading renewal, combined with their openness to feedback, commitment to continuous education, and deep spiritual grounding, speak to the program's comprehensive impact. Through this training, these leaders are better equipped to create transformative environments that address current church needs and

anticipate future challenges. As a result, they can move forward with a renewed sense of purpose and readiness to meet the evolving needs of the local church and the communities they serve.

Journal Entries

These are notes from the journals collected during the “Equipping Ministry Leaders for the Evolving Needs of the Church” training module, which offered participants a deeply enriching experience throughout three powerful sessions. Though delivered with a unique presentation style, each part of the workshop was expertly interwoven to address critical areas of leadership, particularly within the context of the local church. The workshop opened with a focus on grounding leadership in biblical principles, emphasizing that a clear, scripturally rooted vision is essential for effective ministry. Leaders were encouraged to understand how vision aligns with mission, which translates into achievable, measurable goals. Participants expressed that this session offered a fresh perspective, emphasizing that a strong biblical foundation enhances the integrity and purpose of ministry work. Additionally, the discussion on church operations as a form of business resonated deeply, as it stressed the need for careful resource management, budgeting, and structured planning, especially in ministries that may not always prioritize these practical skills.

Building on this foundation, the next part of the training shifted focus to the dynamics of church-specific leadership. This session underscored servant leadership, encouraging leaders to be accountable, flexible, and accessible to those they serve. Unlike business settings, where a team can be chosen, church leaders often inherit diverse

congregations with varying needs and backgrounds. Participants reflected on the importance of fostering trust and connection, understanding that church leaders must guide and uplift everyone under their care. A highlight of this section was the encouragement to undertake self-analysis, pushing leaders to ask tough, introspective questions about the mission and values of their ministry. This reflective process, while challenging, was widely appreciated as a tool for ensuring alignment with God's purpose, sparking deeper dedication to the calling and responsibilities of church leadership.

In the final part of the workshop, participants delved into the administrative aspects of ministry, focusing on the vital role of modern tools and digital platforms in today's church. The facilitator pointed out that many churches, particularly within the Black church community, still operate with an outdated mindset, lacking digital tools such as websites, online giving platforms, and social media engagement. Participants noted how these limitations hinder the church's outreach, especially among younger congregants and those seeking digital connections. The session encouraged leaders to embrace technology as a means of expanding their reach and fostering community. A candid discussion on past ministry failures provided a constructive space for participants to reflect on areas where their churches might be stagnating and to consider actionable changes. This honest exchange was eye-opening for many, highlighting the need for modernization as a key factor in future growth and engagement.

A major takeaway from the entire workshop was the importance of versatility in leadership style, allowing leaders to adapt based on the specific needs of their congregation and context. Participants gained a deeper understanding of various leadership approaches—transformational, charismatic, and situational- and learned how

to identify the best approach for different situations. By examining how their leadership style impacts their effectiveness, many felt empowered to step into a more flexible, compassionate, and adaptive form of leadership. This adaptability was underscored as essential for managing the unique challenges and opportunities within Black church communities, which often face distinct cultural, economic, and social contexts.

In conclusion, participants unanimously felt that the sessions were transformative, equipping them with practical tools and new perspectives essential for their roles in ministry. The blend of scriptural insights, leadership reflection, and practical administration skills created a comprehensive learning experience that enhanced their current leadership capabilities and gave them the confidence to address the evolving demands of the modern church. Many expressed a renewed commitment to their ministry and a deeper resolve to serve with purpose, adaptability, and integrity as they navigate the challenges and changes of today's church landscape.

This project represents the culmination of my Doctor of Ministry (DMin) program, reflecting years of theological study, practical application, and personal transformation. Designed to address the leadership challenges at Bethel Independent Free Methodist Church, it aimed to equip ministry leaders with the skills necessary to reverse the congregation's decline and foster a renewed sense of purpose and vitality. The project's outcomes provide valuable insights into the dynamics of leadership development within a church context and highlight the areas where future improvements are necessary.

Project Effectiveness

The primary objective of this project was to train Bethel Church's ministry leaders in transformational and servant leadership principles, with a focus on fostering adaptability, collaboration, and spiritual grounding. Through the implementation of a seven-week leadership training program, participants engaged in a combination of theoretical lessons, practical discussions, and reflective exercises. The pre- and post-surveys, interviews, and observation feedback demonstrated that the project achieved many of its intended outcomes.

The post-survey results show that participants showed measurable growth in their leadership confidence and adaptability. The majority reported feeling better equipped to lead in the church's current context. Specific sessions, such as those on servant leadership and transformational leadership, were particularly impactful. One participant said, "This program gave me a new perspective on leadership. It's not about control; it's about empowering others to grow in their faith and their service."

Despite these successes, the project also revealed areas of limitation and room for growth. Some participants struggled with adapting to the new technologies discussed during the program, highlighting a need for more practical, hands-on training. Additionally, while most participants expressed enthusiasm for the program's content, a few noted that the time constraints limited deeper engagement with some topics. These challenges do not diminish the program's overall success but serve as important lessons for refining future iterations.

Key Learnings

This project emphasized several key principles of effective leadership development within a church context, such as the importance of spiritual foundations, contextual relevance, collaborative leadership, and adaptability.

The importance of spiritual foundations is leadership in the church cannot be separated from a leader's spiritual journey. Participants who engaged deeply in reflective exercises and journaling demonstrated the most significant growth, spiritually and practically. Contextual relevance is leadership development that must be tailored to the specific challenges and opportunities of the local congregation. The program ensured its relevance and impact by addressing the historical, cultural, and demographic factors unique to Bethel Church. Collaborative leadership is the emphasis on servant leadership, and transformational leadership highlights the need for leaders to collaborate, mentor, and empower others within the congregation. This approach resonated strongly with participants, many of whom noted a shift in their perception of leadership roles. Adaptability is the evolving needs of the church, which requires leaders who are willing to embrace change and innovate. The sessions on postmodern church leadership and the use of technology encouraged participants to think creatively about addressing contemporary challenges.

What I Would Do Differently

While the project met its core objectives, several adjustments could enhance its effectiveness in future applications:

1. **Extended Program Duration:** Expanding the training program from seven weeks to ten weeks provides participants with more time to internalize the material and engage in hands-on practice. This would be especially beneficial for topics like technology integration and conflict resolution.
2. **Mentorship Opportunities:** Pairing participants with experienced ministry leaders as mentors could reinforce learning and provide ongoing support beyond the program, creating a more sustainable model of leadership development.
3. **Incorporating Diverse Learning Modalities:** While the program included discussions, lessons, and journaling, additional methods, such as role-playing scenarios or case studies, could further enhance participants' understanding and application of leadership principles.
4. **Focus on Younger Congregants:** Given Bethel Church's aging demographic, future programs should include strategies for engaging younger members of the congregation. This might involve incorporating insights from youth ministry or addressing generational differences in leadership styles.

Future Implications

The success of this project highlights the potential for leadership development to transform not only individual leaders but also the broader church community. Bethel Church now has a foundation of trained leaders equipped to address its challenges, but ongoing investment in leadership development is essential to maintain momentum. Future initiatives should build on the lessons learned from this project, incorporating feedback from participants and adapting to new challenges as they arise.

Moreover, this project offers a replicable model for other churches facing similar challenges. Small congregations, particularly in rural or underserved areas, often struggle with declining membership and disengaged leadership. Other churches can benefit from similar renewal efforts by implementing a tailored leadership training program rooted in biblical, historical, and contemporary principles.

This project has been both a professional and personal journey of growth. It has reaffirmed the importance of equipping leaders with the tools they need to thrive, not just in their roles but also in their faith. For me, this work represents a culmination of my theological studies, commitment to Bethel Church, and my vision for the future of ministry. While no project is without its imperfections, the lessons learned here are invaluable. They will inform my future work as a pastor, mentor, and leader within the broader Christian community. By fostering a continuous learning and spiritual growth culture, I believe Bethel Church—and churches like it—can survive and thrive in an ever-changing world. This work has only just begun. As Bethel's leaders continue their journey of transformation, I am confident that their efforts will ripple outward, inspiring renewal within their congregation and throughout the community they serve. For me, this project is a testament to the power of faith, resilience, and the enduring call to ministry.

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